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Schools continue to struggle with disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for Black/African American students (Children's Defense Fund, 1975) within a social context that no longer openly discusses or acknowledges the potential impact of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This study is a mixed-methods phenomenology of disciplinary disproportionality at one middle school through the lens of color-blind racism based upon Patricia Hill-Collins's Four Domains of Power (Hill-Collins, 2009). This framework supported the examination of disproportionality as it relates to disciplinary practices and policies, as well as, staff member reports related to cultural beliefs, and interpersonal relationships between students and teachers. Findings revealed lack of awareness, inconsistencies, and denial were factors possibly contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. Cultural beliefs about Black/African American students, their behaviors, and their families were cited by teachers as significant factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. Data revealed the potential influence of color-blind racism on disciplinary disproportionality through beliefs corresponding to the frames of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Beliefs and perceptions across the Four Domains of Power appear to be interconnected and offer valuable insights to further expand inquiries related to disciplinary disproportionality.

DISCIPLINARY DISPROPORTIONALITY AND THE
ORGANIZATION OF POWER

by

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PREFACE

DISCIPLINARY DISPROPORTIONALITY AND THE ORGANIZATION OF POWER

I walked through the gates beneath the words “Arbeit macht frie,” meaning “work sets you free.” I was taken directly to the crematorium where any disillusionment that I naively held about the human capacity to commit unspeakable atrocities was suffocated. As I opened myself to feel the experiences of those persecuted during the Holocaust a part of me died, the part of me that could ignore injustice and remain silent was exterminated at Auschwitz in March 2003.

I took part in the March of Remembrance and Hope, a study-abroad of the Holocaust with a desire to walk in someone else’s shoes. I wanted to see and feel the memories and experiences of the Holocaust for someone considered “other.” I traveled to Poland with a cohort of students who shared the journey with Holocaust survivors, refugees, and rescuers. Irving Roth was my survivor. Sent to Auschwitz at the tender age of 14, Irving was able to survive because of his ability to work within the camp. It was Irving, through his insightful anecdotes and genuine compassion for humanity, who changed me forever. He asked me to make a commitment to recognize the signs that lead to massive atrocities, such as the Holocaust, long before they reach that magnitude. He challenged me to “watch for the signs along the way.”

In order to better understand how seemingly small events can lead to monumental tragedies for certain groups of people, I discovered the theory posed by Raul Hilberg (1992). Hilberg proposed a theory of genocide linked to the treatment of Jews during the

Holocaust. His theory was comprised of three premises. The first premise was exclusion, which included “segregation and ghettoization.” The second step in the process can be characterized as exile, which can be seen as it relates to attempts to separate Jews and non-Jews. The third aspect was extermination, in which “killings had to be conducted in a manner that would limit psychological repercussions in the ranks of the perpetrators, prevent unrest among the victims, and preclude anxiety or protest in the non-Jewish population.” The overall message that can be deduced from Hilberg’s theory is that genocide is a process, in which overlapping of events may occur, but as people become desensitized to the maltreatment associated with one stage, the next stage will eventually bring similar desensitization and participation in social injustice and ultimately genocide. This theory brought me to a new awareness about contemporary issues and the many ways certain students are “excluded” and “exiled” from their classrooms and schools through disciplinary measures such as suspension or expulsion, and ultimately face “extermination” in the form of failure, attrition, or imprisonment. After the March of Remembrance and Hope I spent a great deal of time examining contemporary issues of injustice by examining the impact of labels, the administration of discipline, and the exclusion of certain groups of students.

As I prepare to write my dissertation today, I find myself remembering past injustices that I can do little to change, but asking myself what can I do about events happening right now. The reason I would give to explain why my dissertation topic matters to me is because I promised Irving Roth, “my Holocaust survivor,” that I would try to identify inequalities and injustices perpetrated against human beings and do

something, anything, to address them. I made that promise as both he and I walked back out of Auschwitz beneath the sign reminding me “work sets you free.” While recognizing the blatantly disgusting context with which this sign was used by German soldiers and the manner in which it was likely interpreted by many Holocaust victims and survivors, it is with utmost humility that I reclaim those words and repurpose them to direct my dissertation efforts. I will never be free from the commitment I made to Irving. I will always carry his memory and his directive with me. It is only through my work as a critical thinker, as a professional educator, as a student that I can strive to make this world freer.

I am not Jewish. I have no personal connection to the Holocaust through my family lineage or personal relationships, other than the one I developed with Irving. I commit myself to the issues that affected those various individuals persecuted during the Holocaust, as well as, an ever expanding concern and compassion for any human being who experiences persecution or differential treatment simply because of who they are. Thus, my current work and my interests have led me to focus my dissertation on disciplinary disproportionality and differential treatment of students who are Black in particular. This topic brings together my interest in school discipline with my desire to critically examine social injustices.

While the life altering study-abroad of the Holocaust left me with an unwavering dedication and obligation to seek justice and equity in response to dehumanizing and unjust events, my interest in student behavior and school discipline emerged much earlier in my academic career. During my under-graduate studies and throughout my advanced

degree work as a school psychologist, my interests have always led me to inquiries regarding student behavior and school disciplinary responses. I have continued to pursue professional roles that allow me to investigate and address these issues. Currently, I serve as regional coordinator to provide training and technical support to school districts and school staff regarding positive, proactive disciplinary practices.

I have spent a great deal of time exploring the topic of disciplinary disproportionality and I still have a so much to learn. It is my hope that this dissertation will accurately describe this contemporary injustice in a manner which offers critical insight and challenges the myriad of forces that maintain its existence. With a hope-filled heart, I want my work related to disciplinary disproportionality to create the possibility of liberation from racial inequality and injustice in our society through critical awareness and the revitalization of democracy in educational settings.

In addition to my study abroad experience and my professional background, my personal life experiences shape my interests and insights as a researcher. My life has offered many opportunities to experience power through possession or imposition.

Not to perpetuate labeling, but in order to describe my background I will share some descriptors of myself. I am white. While I would currently self-identify as middle-class, I grew up in a single-parent, low-socio-economic home.

I have lived on an isolated farm and I've lived in inner-city government housing. I have attended a female, single-sex college and a historically Black University. I have experienced representing the minority and the majority. What this has afforded me is the opportunity to walk with a foot in each world. I know what privileges I might be

bestowed when I am part of the majority. I also am very aware of the discrimination and challenges when I am part of the minority. What an amazing gift I have been given. Having dual-experiences with social inequity is not an experience exclusive to me, though my awareness and interpretation of this experience is quite distinctive and has influenced the lenses through which I observe social power structures. Despite the inherent privilege and power that might be bestowed upon me in any one given circumstance, I am keenly aware of the experiences of many individuals not privy to that same power and privilege.

Throughout my childhood I wasn't exposed to different cultures or races. Even when we lived in more diverse areas due to our circumstances, we self-segregated. I learned only that certain characteristics meant "other." My exposure to diversity didn't begin until college. I have had the good fortune to have very diverse educational experiences at the college level including attendance at; a college that supports predominantly students from low socio-economic status with work experiences, a historically Black college with an emphasis on Afro-centric education; and a female single-sex college providing an emphasis on feminist perspectives. This late exposure to diversity made me acutely aware of the mis-education, stereotypes, and racist ideology that I was exposed to during my childhood. Through course work and supportive relationships with professors and peers, I was encouraged to critically examine my own racial identity and understanding of racism in our society. I recognize the impact of personal awareness of beliefs and identity with regard to the topic of race and I bring that to bear on this research project.

My beliefs about education are the result of my mother. I was raised by a strong woman, hardened by reality and wise from suffering. She directed me from a very young age to complete my education because no one can ever take that away from me. She knew that education was power. It is in honor of this belief, that I contend any barriers or exclusionary practices that prevent individuals from access to a fair and equitable education are oppressive acts of violence.

I am a graduate student in the Educational Leadership Program emphasizing cultural foundations and dedicated to social justice, equity, and peace. My educational experiences are the lenses through which I undertake this research project. My beliefs and opinions about our society's on-going struggle with power structures that maintain racism, stereotypes, bias, injustice, and inequality influence my desire to conduct this research. I recognize my own racial identity, my class, my experiences with power structures across various contexts, my beliefs about education and injustice shape the contours of this research project.

Social construction ideology is the foundation upon which all other theories and ideologies are presented and through which they are interpreted within this project. The ways that truth, meaning, and knowledge are defined, created, produced, and reproduced through social experiences and interactions offers a way to not only understand how concepts and events come to exist, but also the possibilities for alternative creations. I contend that the fluid, ever-changing nature of socially constructed meanings requires the acknowledgement that the resources and citations included within this research project, as well as all content and organization constructed by me in order to create meaning, are

socially constructed efforts to create meaning and knowledge. As such, they are not the Truth, nor are they permanent or static. This is but one contextually situated fluid interpretation and possibility.

Today racism is often thought of and treated as though it is no longer a relevant social issue, but rather, a thing of the past. People who have the privilege and power to profess this belief, might remain insulated within their own beliefs unless contradictions to these beliefs are presented and the underlying power structures maintaining racism are revealed. There are indeed many contradictions to the belief that racism is all but over, among these, is the evidence of disciplinary disproportionality. The power structures that perpetuate and maintain disproportionate outcomes for students on the basis of race can provide valuable insights into our understanding of power and racism in our schools today. With that specific focus, I remind myself of what can happen when a society accepts differential treatment of certain groups of people and I hope to engage in work that addresses injustice and makes us all freer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	xvii
 CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Disciplinary Disproportionality	4
Calculating Disproportionality.....	5
Historical Emergence.....	6
The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.....	7
Civil Rights Act of 1964	8
Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Runaway Youth	11
Historical implications	15
Exploring the Construction of Disciplinary Disproportionality	17
Discipline	17
Alternative Factors to Consider	19
Socio-economic status	20
Gender.....	21
Teacher.....	22
School	23
Zero tolerance	24
Potential Impact	25
Democracy	27
Conflict between Democratic Ideals and Racial Equality	28
Contributing Factors: Capitalism and Moral Bankruptcy	29
History, Democracy, and Race	31
Vision of Dissertation	33
Conclusion	35
 II. POWER AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRUTH, DISCIPLINE, AND RACE	 36
Power, Truth, and Discourse.....	37
Discipline and Power	41
Deviance	43
Punishment.....	46

Racial Identity	48
Race and Power.....	54
Construction of Racism.....	56
Racism.....	57
Systemic/Institutional	59
Color-blind Racism.....	61
The Four Domains of Power.....	64
Framework for Examining Disciplinary Disproportionality.....	65
Conclusion	67
 III. METHODOLOGY	 69
Research Site Description	69
Demographics	70
Teachers	70
Staff.....	71
Academic Profile	71
Research Site Selection Criteria.....	72
Relationship to Research Site	73
Procedures.....	73
Discipline Data.....	74
Discipline data analyses.....	76
Types of Behavioral Offenses.....	77
Policy Data.....	77
Policy descriptions	78
Policy analysis	79
Staff Survey	81
Four domains of power subscales	83
Staff survey analysis	83
Interviews.....	83
Interviewees	84
Interview analysis	85
Summary	86
 IV. DISCIPLINARY AND STRUCTURAL DOMAINS	 88
Disciplinary Domain.....	89
Types of Behavior.....	90
Disciplinary Responses	91
Disciplinary Domain Themes	97
We're not sure there is a problem	97
Even if there is a problem, there is no need to address it	102

We are unaware.....	104
Teacher tolerance	106
Their behavior is different	109
The punishment is insufficient.....	113
Disciplinary Domain Summary	115
Structural Domain.....	116
Structural Analyses	117
Categories of behavior in policy	118
Disruptive omission	120
We are consistently inconsistent.....	121
How does the continuum work?	124
Structural Domain Summary	126
Chapter Summary	128
 V. CULTURAL AND INTERPERSONAL DOMAINS	132
Cultural Domain.....	133
Cultural Analysis	133
It's the student.....	133
It's their family	137
Culture and race are confusing, but it's definitely not about race.....	140
Anything but race.....	145
Cultural conflict	148
Cultural awareness	151
Younger and newer teacher perspective	152
Cultural Domain Summary	153
Interpersonal Domain.....	155
Interpersonal Analysis	155
Racism or influenced by race.....	156
Cultural interpretation	157
Meaningful relationships	158
They have a relationship with the Black/ African American administrator	161
The misinterpretation of relationships	164
What it takes to form a meaningful relationship.....	166
Interpersonal Domain Summary	168
Analysis of the Four Domains of Power Model	170
Chapter Summary	174
 VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION FOR THE FOUR DOMAINS OF POWER.....	180

Introduction.....	180
Methods.....	181
Findings.....	182
Examining disciplinary disproportionality through the Four Domains of Power.....	183
Beliefs and practices contributing to disciplinary disproportionality	186
Acceptance and resistance within the Four Domains of Power.....	190
Discussion	192
Limitations	194
Implications.....	196
Resistance and the Four Domains of Power	197
Areas for further development	198
Conclusion	200
REFERENCES	204
APPENDIX A. INSTRUMENTATION	217
APPENDIX B. CATEGORIES OF BEHAVIOR.....	224
APPENDIX C. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS	225
APPENDIX D. TABULAR RESULTS	227

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table D1. Characteristics and Disciplinary Patterns of Middle School Participants ($N = 611$)	227
Table D2. Categories of Disciplinary Code Violations for Black ($n = 302$) and White ($n = 398$) Students	228
Table D3. Specific Behavioral Offenses for Black ($n = 302$) and White ($n = 398$) Students	229
Table D4. In-School and Out-of-School Suspensions for Black ($n = 302$) and White ($n = 398$) Students	230
Table D5. Means and Standard Deviations for Staff Survey Items	231
Table D6. Policy Crosswalk	234
Table D7. Relationships across Four Domains of Power Subscales	238
Table D8. Means and Standard Deviations across Domains of Power Subscales.....	239

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development. (Annan, 2012, para. 1)

If educators do indeed believe that students have a right to an education, it should give one pause to consider factors that slowly diminish this right by removing any student from the school environment. In the measurable space between a student being fully present and fully excluded from educational settings, what can be said of the brief, but constant, and ever increasing removals of students from their rightful educational environment? If there is agreement about the value and power of access to educational opportunities, how can any exclusionary practice be tolerated?

Exclusionary practices, such as suspensions and expulsions, are just that, exclusionary. These practices affect students across a variety of demographic variables and have been found to be ineffective and give rise to significant concerns about future risk-factors resulting from such practices (Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004; Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, & Catalano, 2006). While it seems that virtually no demographic group is unaffected by these practices, certain groups of students are more often denied access to the power of education, and are instead excluded from their education by systems of power, simply because of the color of their skin.

For more than three decades data collected on the number of suspensions and expulsions has revealed higher rates of exclusionary disciplinary actions are administered to Black/African American students (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). Disciplinary Disproportionality is the term used to describe the trend of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for Black/African American students. The emergence of this trend took place almost immediately after schools were forced to desegregate and has continued throughout the country since that time (Southern Regional Council & Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, 1973; Thornton & Trent, 1988). This continues to be a National problem with little evidence of progress for mediating the disparities (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008).

When considering Disciplinary Disproportionality, at the core of this issue there is behavior resulting in disciplinary action and there is race. Neither issue is objective or free from individual interpretation. Disciplinary Disproportionality is further complexified by a National struggle to critically examine the conflicts between our democratic ideals and racism. Beliefs about racism in a post-Civil Rights era currently reflect the notion that racism no longer exists (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). However, disciplinary disproportionality has roots that can be traced to reveal the race-related historical context from which it originally emerged (Southern Regional Council & Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, 1973). While the term racism is, and will most likely always be, fluid and reflect changes in social ideology, contemporary definitions about the most recent evolution of the concept of racism into a form of color-blind racism, none-the-less suggest it does in fact still exist.

The systematic denial of educational rights for Black/African American students is not an issue isolated within certain types of schools, with certain types of students or teachers, or even within certain geographical areas. It is not the result of any one system or individual or one belief. It is a vastly complex issue deeply woven within the fabric of our Country caught in the balance between belief in the power of democracy and the disparate distribution of power within that democracy.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the disproportionate representation of Black/African American students as recipients of exclusionary disciplinary outcomes. The persistent evidence and continuous redefinition of racism and color-blind racism serve as contextual factors surrounding the emergence of this issue, and therefore, serve as critical factors to explore regarding the persistence of disciplinary disproportionality. Patricia Hill-Collins proposed that color-blind racism is “a system of power” organized around Four domains (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 44). To bring together the topic of disciplinary disproportionality and racism, this study will focus on the intersection of these variables to identify how power is organized within a school on the basis of race. Specifically, the data from one middle school will be examined to describe the influence and impact of the Four Domains of Power (Hill-Collins, 2009) which include behavioral rules and expectations, policies, cultural beliefs, and interpersonal encounters and provide insight into the way power is organized on the basis of race. A comprehensive summary and analysis of the schools’ disciplinary data, disciplinary policies, administrator and staff beliefs and perceptions regarding discipline, behavior, and race will be examined to tell the story of how disciplinary disproportionality takes place in this particular middle

school. The goal is to provide a comprehensive description of the phenomena of disciplinary disproportionality for this school as well as, offer an examination of the power structures which are implicated in the continued existence of such disciplinary disparities.

Disciplinary Disproportionality

According to the Civil Rights Data Collection Report (2006), the projected number of suspensions for students in the United States was 3,328,754. While Black/African American students account for 17% of the total school population, they account for 37% of out-of school suspension events, 35% of events involving corporal punishment, and 37% of expulsion events. Three years later, during the next available reporting cycle, the Office for Civil Rights (2012) reflects the constancy of this national epidemic. Data for the 2009-10 school year indicates that Black/African American students represent a minor increase in the overall population to 18%, yet they account for 35% of students suspended one time, 46% of students suspended more than once, and 39% of students expelled (Office for Civil Rights, 2012).

Disciplinary disproportionality is the term used to describe the inequitable distribution of disciplinary actions in schools (Wallace et al., 2008). Exclusionary discipline includes the “use of suspension, expulsions, and other disciplinary action resulting in the removal [of the student] from the typical educational environment” as a consequence for inappropriate behavior (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010, p. 59). For more than three decades, with minor variations, data has revealed that Black/African American students are suspended at a rate from 2 to 4 times greater than their

White/Caucasian peers (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziegenberg, 2000; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Hinojosa, 2008; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011).

Calculating Disproportionality

Specifically, a Risk Ratio is one way in which disproportionality can be calculated. A Risk Index is a calculation of "the percentage of a given racial/ethnic group that is in a specific category" (The Equity Project, 2012). A Risk Ratio is a comparison of the "Risk Index for the target racial/ethnic group and the risk index of all other groups" (The Equity Project, 2012). The Risk Ratio presents a quantifiable number indicating the level of over or under-representation of members of a certain racial/ethnic group to be included in a particular category. In the case of disciplinary disproportionality the category would calculate the risk for certain racial/ethnic groups for receiving suspensions, expulsions, or other exclusionary disciplinary outcomes.

Despite evidence of "statistical disproportionality, in and of itself, [it] is not a certain indicator of discrimination or bias" (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002, p. 320). Although the data might reveal disproportionate frequencies or outcomes, it is much more difficult to uncover evidence to support the claim that the disproportionality is the result of racism or bias. According to Skiba et al. (2002), additional data must be collected to determine bias, however, even "a direct survey of racial attitudes will probably fail to capture bias, since self-reports about disciplinary practices involving race or gender would likely be highly influenced by social acceptability" (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 320). Therefore, making the determination that bias is a factor in the presence of disproportionality will likely result from research efforts which rule out alternative

explanations that might account for the reported differences (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 320).

In order to critically examine the implications of bias resulting in disproportionality, it is important to consider the historical and contextual circumstances and events surrounding the emergence of disciplinary disproportionality more than four decades ago.

Historical Emergence

School desegregation is the beginning point for discussion of disciplinary disproportionality. Many factors would render the concept meaningless prior to desegregation efforts. Prior to enacting laws affording equal access, there would be no need to make comparisons between Black/African American and White/Caucasian students to ensure equality. Thus, “disproportionality” would be rendered a moot point. With regards to discipline, it is important to note that discipline for Black/African American students would significantly increase following desegregation (Southern Regional Council & Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, 1973; Thornton & Trent, 1988). The other significant issue related to disciplinary disproportionality and segregation would be lack of adequate data about the issue. Prior to desegregation and subsequent Civil Rights Laws, data collection was limited by lack of availability, uniformity, and accuracy (Southern Regional Council & Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, 1973).

With the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) schools were required to desegregate. However, the language suggested that students should be admitted to public schools “on a racially nondiscriminatory basis with all deliberate speed” (as cited in U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1976, p. 6). According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, “All deliberate speed” became the catchword that spawned massive resistance, as

the South deliberated but refused to desegregate [such that] ten years after *Brown*, only 1.2% of the nearly 3 million Black/African American students in the 11 Southern States attended school with White/Caucasian students (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1976, p. 6).

School districts throughout the Nation resisted desegregation through various means. Given the lack of enforcement and repercussions, many school districts continued segregation practices until directly confronted by court order. One school district vehemently opposed to integration completely closed the school district rather operate in a district “wherein white and colored children are taught together” (*Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (Va.)*, 1964). As a result, “colored children in that district were without formal education from 1959-1963” (*Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (Va.)*, 1964). This case marked a turning point for the enforcement of school desegregation and the expediency with which school districts should comply with desegregation mandates. In 1964 the Court concluded that “The time for mere ‘deliberate speed’ has run out” and required the schools to be reopened and granted the district the right to levy additional taxes in order to operate desegregated schools (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1976, p. 6; *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (Va.)*, 1964).

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Nearly a decade after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights compiled data about desegregation for advisement to the President and Congress (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1963). The report asserted, “Negro schoolchildren still attend segregated schools

in all parts of the Nation” (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1963, p. 53). The courts, having given over authority to lower federal courts, combined with the absence of federal supports for implementation or monitoring desegregation results in continued segregation of African American students (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1963).

In a report to the President and Congress in 1963, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights concluded,

The determination of most southern school boards to employ every contrivance to evade or avoid desegregation continues to thwart implementation of the *School Segregation Cases*. Even token desegregation usually has come only after a lawsuit is threatened or prosecuted. The Commission has found no evidence that this resistance is dissipating. (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1963, p. 68)

Further, the report presented the following recommendations (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1963, pp. 68–70): Congress should enact legislation “requiring” every school to “adopt and publish within 90 days . . . a plan for prompt compliance with the constitutional duty to provide nonsegregated public education”; if the plan is not adopted or implemented then further legal action should be taken by the Attorney General; the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights should be authorized to provide technical and financial assistance to schools attempting to desegregate; additionally, the President should

call a White House conference of distinguished educators and experts in civil rights in the field of education to discuss how the Federal Government can assist State and local school boards in solving the problem of how to give all American children an equal opportunity for an education.

Civil Rights Act of 1964. Within one year of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Report, the Federal Government responded with landmark legislation,

incorporating many of the recommendations for addressing desegregation. The Civil Rights Act (1964) drastically changed the Federal Government's response to discrimination. Specifically, the law enforced voting rights, access to public facilities, public education, and prevented discrimination in programs that receive federal assistance. The Act also authorized grants, training institutes, and technical assistance to overcome problems of desegregation (Civil Rights Act, 1964). Most importantly, this law brought with it specific means of enforcement through the authority of the Attorney General to "institute suits" as well as the authority of the Federal Departments and Agencies to withhold appropriations of funds to programs that fail to comply with the law.

While applying to other areas of social governance, Title IV (Section 601) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states, "No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Civil Rights Act, 1964). Title V of the law amended the Civil Rights Act of 1957 as it relates to the duties and authority of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to continue its role related to investigation, reporting, legal advisement, and information dissemination. The law directed all Federal Departments and Agencies which provide federal assistance to "effectuate the provisions of Section 601" (Civil Rights Act, 1964) to determine compliance with the law, and issued the authority to enact procedures to redress non-compliance by withholding federal funds.

The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 marked significant changes for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 required the Commissioner of Education “to survey and report to the President and the Congress on the extent to which discrimination because of race, color, religion, or national origin limited equal educational opportunities in public educational institutions in the United States” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1972). “Within a week after enactment of the law, teams of HEW officials were touring the South and meeting with superintendents of schools to discuss voluntary compliance with the new law” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1972). This marked the beginning of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare’s “civil rights compliance program” that was inclusive of the legal implications for “school districts, hospitals, nursing homes and welfare agencies” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1972). In June of 1967, “all civil rights compliance activities were transferred to the Office for Civil Rights” (OCR) under the direction of the Special Assistant to the Secretary for Civil Rights, where efforts could more “adequately be enforced” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1972). Beginning in 1970, the Office for Civil Rights was also required oversee the allocation of Emergency School Aid funds (Emergency School Aid Act, 1970) which were specifically distributed to support desegregation efforts in school districts.

The allocation of federal funds in combination with increased authority to withhold those funds for failure to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, resulted in greater governmental accountability regarding Civil Rights assurances. It further served

to give recourse for civil rights violations and focus efforts on identification and enforcement of such transgressions. Desegregation was no longer a segregated topic, it was at the forefront of political and governmental efforts. Specifically, data collected from school districts regarding disciplinary actions and race would come to be the basis for determining disciplinary disproportionality and would serve as an indication of possible violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Runaway Youth. Peter Holmes, Director of the Office for Civil Rights under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare testified at the Hearings before the Committee on Equal Opportunities of the Committee on Education and Labor House of Representatives on May 12, 1974. He cited information about the implications of racism, as it relates to desegregation, and the subsequent rise in racial discrimination in disciplinary matters. Holmes (1974) was quoted as saying,

the Office for Civil Rights has long recognized that the physical desegregation of a school system does not necessarily mean the end of discrimination. It often means that the discrimination is removed from public view, as in the case of the dual system, and relegated to the classroom or, as we shall see shortly, to the administrator's office. (p. 475)

The documentation from the hearing begin with the specific focus on the issue of how disciplinary practices are impacting minority students. Holmes refers to “*The Student Pushout*” as a study that had uncovered the manner in which desegregation efforts were linked with increased suspension and expulsion of minority students. In this study of 8 Southern states, 4 of the 8 had “serious black expulsion problems” (Southern Regional

Council & the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, 1973, p. 9) and subsequently increased drop-out rates. He asserted the “value of the study was to focus public attention on the kind of racial discrimination that might be going on inside a school once that school has been desegregated” (Holmes, 1974, p. 474).

Holmes explained the limited action on behalf of OCR was due to the previous focus on complaints, as well as the amount of resources necessary to build a case. He explained that OCR’s compliance efforts have in the past been primarily focused on a “case-by-case basis” in response to complaints (Holmes, 1974, p. 475). He asserted that enforcement in such cases would require “far more evidence than percentages and ratios of expulsions and suspensions” and such efforts require “thorough, on-site investigation by experienced, trained staff” (Holmes, 1974, p. 475). However, Mr. Holmes reported that through the data from the annual surveys school districts would be identified as having possible compliance issues, thereby reducing the issue of initiating investigations based on complaints.

During the hearing, Mr. Holmes asserted that the numbers and percentages presented in the school survey data do not necessary equate to non-compliance or discrimination. He claimed further investigation and on-site reviews were necessary to make those conclusions. As such, the ability of the department to provide such in-depth inquiries was limited by time and resources. While investigative efforts to prove discrimination were purported to require more in-depth assessment, Holmes did express that discrimination might in fact be an underlying factor explaining the disproportionate data. A member of the committee posed the question to Holmes asking if he thought “acts

of prejudice on the part of some of the instructors and people in charge” were associated with “tougher disciplines” that were administered to minority students (Holmes, 1974, p. 480). Mr. Holmes’s response affirmed that discrimination might be a factor. He stated, “I think that is safe to assume. . . . Different cultural conceptions, perceptions” (Holmes, 1974, p. 480).

Holmes explained the process of addressing compliance since 1965 under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare OCR identified and investigated possible violations, compiled evidence, and present findings. The agency then would issue a requirement for corrective action, when necessary. If the corrective actions were “not forthcoming or satisfactory” then the agency would “initiate legal proceedings” or as a last resort “terminate Federal financial assistance” (Holmes, 1974, p. 478).

A detailed description of the data requirements and submissions on the topic of disciplinary disproportionality were included in the report. Data about race and suspensions were collected in the national OCR survey for the first time in 1973 for the 1972-73 school year. Prior to that time, OCR collected data about expulsions in 1971. Results from the 1971 survey found that minority students were twice as likely to be expelled than non-minority students, and the Black/African American students were three times as likely to be expelled than non-minority students (Holmes, 1974, p. 489). Districts found to have disproportionate expulsion data were asked to submit additional data about suspensions. Thus, only limited data about suspensions was available prior to 1973, primarily from those districts with disproportionate expulsion rates.

Holmes testified that simply by requiring schools to report suspensions by race and ethnicity would likely increase the awareness of the discrepancies at the school level. His hope, but not his assumption, was that schools would attempt to address the issue after having been made aware of the disproportionate rates (Holmes, 1974, p. 481).

The disciplinary data collected by HEW/OCR were published in several reports by the Children's Defense Fund in 1974 and 1975. In October 1974 the Children's Defense Fund (CDF, 1974) published *Children Out of School in America*, a comprehensive report examining reasons for student non-enrollment in schools. This report was based on census data from 1970 which indicated the prevalence and location of the issue, data from a national survey of more than 8,500 homes conducted by CDF to examine parent and child experiences and perceptions about the issue, as well as data from the Office for Civil Rights. According to census data outlined in the report, more than 2 million children between the ages of 7 and 17 were not enrolled in school in 1970 (CDF, 1974, p. 1). The report contends that "for some groups of children who are minority, poor and in secondary schools, suspension seems to have become a commonplace, informal and unquestioned occurrence hidden from public view and scrutiny" (CDF, 1974, p. 117). Based on data collected by the Office for Civil Rights from 1972-1973 from 5 selected states, "152,904 children were suspended at least once for over 575,000 school days or 3,200 school years" (CDF, 1974, p. 5).

In response to numerous comments, complaints, and inquiries following the publication of *Children Out of School in America* (CDF, 1974), the Children's Defense Fund released a follow-up report specific to the topic of suspensions. School

Suspensions: Are they helping children? (CDF, 1975) brings together the rise in public concern about school safety and discipline with the increasing trend of student suspensions. The report presents more detailed analysis of discipline data from the 1972-73 school year collected by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights from 2,862 school districts (CDF, 1975). The report also drew from the survey conducted for Children Out of School (CDF, 1974) and offers a more in-depth examination of the OCR's 1972-73 suspension data and CDF survey responses regarding reasons, frequency, and duration of suspensions, particularly highlighting the implications of race on each. Specifically, the data indicated that Black/African American students are suspended at a rate that is three times higher than White/Caucasian students at the elementary school level and a rate that is two times higher at the secondary level (Children's Defense Fund, 1975).

Historical implications. Disciplinary disproportionality is historically and contextually situated within the Civil Rights era, and subsequent legislation, federal policies, advocacy, monitoring, data collection, and enforcement of desegregation. Multiple agencies brought the inquiry, legislative momentum, and authority to expose the vestiges of discrimination and segregation to light. As such, the period of time following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 facilitated the involvement of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office for Civil Rights in data collection efforts which led to evidence of disciplinary disproportionality. Legal responses, public awareness, and advocacy efforts brought with them the involvement of other agencies such as the

Children's Defense Fund and the Southern Regional Council & the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial.

In the decades that have followed this aspect of Civil Rights enforcement, researchers have continued to conduct research to increase our awareness and understanding of disciplinary disproportionality, however, federal monitoring and enforcement of sanctions appears to have declined over time. As recently as the spring of 2010, however, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan revitalized a commitment to federal monitoring and enforcement for addressing disciplinary disproportionality and asserted such efforts were directly relevant to continued vigilance in Civil Rights enforcement (Losen, 2011). In a speech delivered at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, Secretary Duncan admitted the complexity of contemporary Civil Rights issues and acknowledged the limited efforts to respond to various forms of discrimination on behalf of the Office for Civil Rights in the past decade (Duncan, 2010). His speech served to reignite contemporary Civil Rights efforts and reinforce the commitment of the Office for Civil Rights to provide increased monitoring, enforcement, and technical support to address discrimination, as required by the Civil Rights Act (1964). He concluded by asserting,

In America, education is the great equalizer. It doesn't matter what your race, wealth, special needs, or zip code is- every child is entitled to a quality education. That's why the fight for equal educational opportunity is about so much more than education—it is a fight for social justice. (Duncan, 2010, para. 48)

Exploring the Construction of Disciplinary Disproportionality

In the past three decades, a great deal of research has been dedicated to identifying the many influential constructs and concepts relevant to disciplinary disproportionality. Understanding the ways in which discipline is defined and conceptualized, as well as, the ways that society normalizes and labels deviant behavior can offer insight into the fluid, ungrounded concepts and socially constructed interpretations which have a profound impact on the distribution of power within schools through disciplinary outcomes.

Discipline

The disciplinary system in schools is comprised of “physical spaces,” “the rules, codes, rewards, and punishments prescribed by state laws, by custom, and by written and unwritten standards of social interactions,” as well as “manners and politeness that govern the relationships between adults and children” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 40). Disciplinary systems and structures are often viewed as the site of moral engagement in which adults imbue students with necessary social and moral behaviors expected of citizenry. School rules are utilized to control students’ physical, linguistic, emotional expression, and expressions of individuality (Ferguson, 2001). Furthermore, within classroom settings teachers control “movement of bodies through time and space” through direction regarding “when tasks begin, how long they last, when they end, and they can be carried out” as well as policing “of bodies and presentation of self” (Ferguson, 2001, pp. 62–65).

The laws and regulations of these disciplinary structures are presumed to be and treated by school staff as “universal truths, blind and neutral to differences of class, race, and gender among groups of children” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 41). However, student perceptions suggest an awareness of the lack of neutrality and the recognition that rules are often “arbitrarily applied, [and] often flagrantly ignored, by the adults” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 104). Monroe (2005) asserts, “Limited racial and socioeconomic diversity in educational circles of power has inhibited professionals’ recognition of school disciplinary practices as socially defined constructs” (p. 47).

Further validating the subjectivity with which behaviors are interpreted and punishments administered, research studies suggest that Black/African American students appear to be referred to the office at higher rates for infractions that are both less serious and more subjective in their interpretation than White/Caucasian students. White students were significantly more likely than Black/African American students to be referred to the office for smoking, leaving without permission, vandalism, and obscene language. Black/African American students were more likely to be referred for disrespect, excessive noise, threats, and loitering (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). While researchers have indicated that there are no discernible differences in problematic behaviors engaged in by African American students (Bahr & Fuchs, 1991, as cited in Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010), their behaviors might be subject to interpretations which results in different disciplinary decisions. Several studies suggest this might be the result of misinterpretation of African American student behaviors as inappropriate, such as overlapping speech as disrespect, play fighting as

aggression, and ritualized humor as insults (Hanna, 1988; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clark, 2004, as cited in Monroe, 2005).

For students who believe that their teachers have higher expectations of them, their rate of suspension is 26% less than students who do not share this belief. Thus, suggesting, not only do teachers beliefs impact disciplinary outcomes, but also student perceptions of teacher beliefs contribute to the overall explanation of differences in disciplinary outcomes for students (Hinojosa, 2008).

Alternatives Factors to Consider

When exploring the factors that contribute to disciplinary disproportionality it is critical to ask questions about the intersections of identity to learn more about who is affected by these practices. As Ferguson (2001) points out, there is a great deal of reluctance to talk about race as a factor contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. To allay those concerns, researchers have explored other factors, such as gender and class. However, none of these factors alone sufficiently explains the occurrence and sustained presence of disciplinary disproportionality.

Identity is not singularly constituted. Racial identity is one aspect of the intricately “intertwined” identities of individuals which include class, gender, sexual culture, as well as race and ethnicity (Bettie, 2003, p. 44). This limitation is acknowledged, given the almost exclusive focus on race within this paper. With the recognition that individuality must be recognized as more than the singular expressions of race, class, or gender, exploration of each of these variables overlap and offer crucial

considerations for understanding the complexity of examining any one aspect of identity in isolation.

Hinojosa (2008) conducted an in-depth analysis of student beliefs, as well as home and school factors associated with differences in suspension rates for Black/African American students. While evidence indicated factors associated with family structure, such as having two parents within the home and self-reported school engagement slightly decrease the risk for suspension for Black/African American students, neither variable can fully explain the racial disparity. Students who believe that their teachers have higher expectations of them also had a reduced risk of suspension. Even when controlling for gender, home factors, and beliefs about teacher perceptions, Black/African American students are still 249% more likely to have an out-of-school suspension (Hinojosa, 2008).

Socio-economic status. When exploring the implications of class as they related to disciplinary disproportionality, it is important to recognize the greater chance of certain minority groups being represented within the category of lower socio-economic groups. In 2010, the National poverty rate for Black/African American individuals was 27.4% compared to 9.9% for White/Caucasian individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Thus, determining the impact of socio-economic status and race on disciplinary disproportionality are difficult to separate, given the higher rate of Black/African American individuals represented within the lower socio-economic grouping. Students who attend a school with higher rates of low-income students or are a member of a family identified as low-income are at greater risk of punitive disciplinary outcomes (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Skiba et al., 2002; Wu et al., 1982).

While socio-economic status does contribute to disproportionate representation in disciplinary outcomes, a strong ethnicity effect remains after controlling for poverty (Skiba et al., 2002).

One comprehensive study on the topic conducted a series of logistic regressions with 14 years of National data to evaluate racial disparities in disciplinary outcomes by controlling for factors associated with class, such as “parental education, family structure, single-parent household, and urbanicity of neighborhood” (Wallace et al., 2008). Through these analyses, race continued to remain a significant predictor of discipline after statistically controlling for these income related variables.

Gender. Simply being male increases the risk for receiving out of school suspension by 51% and in school suspension by 61% (Hinojosa, 2008). Numerous research studies have examined gender to determine if it serves as factor that can account for occurrences of disciplinary disproportionality, (Gordon, Della Pianna, & Kelcher, 2000; Gregory, 1997; Hinojosa, 2008; Mendez et al., 2002; Nichols, William, & Iadicola, 1999; Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000; Skiba et al., 2002). While gender is a significant factor associated with disciplinary outcomes, gender alone cannot explain the disproportionate representation that occurs on the basis of race. The most recent Civil Rights Data Report (2012) indicates that while 1 in 5 Black/African American male students receive an out-of-school suspension, 1 in 10 Black/African American females also receive out-of school suspension. Thus, the influence of gender cannot account for higher rates of disciplinary actions for both male and female student who are Black/African American. Rather, racial disparities in school suspension appear to be

greatly impacted by disproportionate rate of office referral for African-American students (Skiba et al., 2002).

Teacher. Factors such as a racial/ethnic match between students and teacher have been shown to have an impact on the teacher's evaluation of student behavior. When a student does not share the same racial/ ethnic designation as his or her teacher, that student has a much greater risk of being perceived as disruptive for both minority and non-minority students (Dee, 2005). These evaluations of student behavior can, in turn, impact academic evaluations. Researchers have found that teachers' perceptions of student behavior have a significant impact on their judgments of academic skills (Bennett, Gottesman, Rock, & Cerullo, 1993). Further research has documented differential treatment of Black/African American students by teachers. One study found that teachers interact less and provide less praise for Black/African American students, and that students' perceptions corroborate this differential treatment (Guerra, Attar, & Weissberg, 1997). Researchers have also revealed the potential influence of teachers in disciplinary outcomes through student perceptions. Sheets (1996) found that "students of color" perceive that teachers are biased in their responses and arbitrarily use disciplinary responses "to control or remove" students they don't like.

While mean rates of "office referral showed large, statistically significant differences by both gender and race," these rates appear to be most significantly influenced by teachers' perceptions of those behaviors and/or the students demonstrating them (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 333). In contrast, evaluations of disparities at the

administrative level reflecting the “disposition of the disciplinary referral showed no evidence of racial disproportionality” (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 333).

School. Monroe (2005) suggests a number of factors must be considered and addressed in order to eliminate disciplinary disproportionality. It is suggested that zero tolerance policies, failure to tolerate cultural differences, and the establishment of a combative environment contribute to the on-going disparities in discipline. Monroe (2005) contends that norms are created by those in positions of power. In addition to these systemic factors, the type of school might reveal important considerations about factors that contribute to disciplinary disproportionality.

The power imposed upon or wielded within schools appears to vary with the type of school setting. Rausch and Skiba (2004) conducted a state-wide investigation of disciplinary disproportionality for students attending schools in Indiana. The results indicated a strong effect based on the type of school the student attends. The highest overall rates of suspension occur at the secondary school level, however, the highest rates of disproportionality in use of suspensions for Black/African American students occurs at the elementary school level with a rate that is 6 times higher than that of White/Caucasian students (Rausch & Skiba, 2004). Black/African American students experienced school suspensions at a rate that was higher overall than students of other races regardless of whether the school was “urban,” “suburban,” “town,” or “rural.” Interestingly, the data revealed that the highest overall rate of suspensions for Black/African American students occurs in suburban schools (52.39 per 100 Black/African American students; Rausch & Skiba, 2004). In contrast to the highest suspension rate experiences by White/Caucasian

students, which occurs in urban schools (17 per 100 White/Caucasian students) (Rausch & Skiba, 2004). Suburban schools are also the site where the greatest disproportionality occurs for expulsions of Black/African American students, as the risk is 2.5 greater in this school setting (Rausch & Skiba, 2004). The finding related to suburban schools and disproportionality has many interesting implications. Given suburban schools often have sufficient resources and fewer students who qualify for free/reduced lunches (Rausch & Skiba, 2004), these results call to light concerns about racial beliefs and ideology existing within the school structure, which may or may not reflect dominant ideology present within suburban contexts.

Zero tolerance. In addition to considerations about the type and level of school, the policies within schools create the structure and enforcement protocol for addressing disciplinary actions. Since the 1990's following federal and state laws enforcing "Zero Tolerance" policies in the judicial system, schools followed suit and applied a variety of exclusionary practices for students with weapons. Harsh zero tolerance policies have been broadened to include threats, drugs, and other offenses, but the challenge with the policy is found in the rigidity and refusal to consider circumstances, such that Zero Tolerance policies have come to be viewed as "a quick and dirty way of kicking kids out" (Goodman, as cited in Giroux, 2006, p. 164). According to Giroux (2006), such policies not only reinforce racially discriminatory notions of Black/African American youth as violent, but also "reinforce racial inequalities that plague school systems" (p. 165).

According to Russlyn Ali, the U.S. Department of Education Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, zero tolerance policies are those that "result in mandatory expulsion of

any student who commits one or more offenses” (Office for Civil Rights, 2012, p. 12). Even if such policies allow for administrative discretion, they would none-the-less be considered a zero tolerance policy, if they call for a prescribed “mandatory minimum” for any given offense (Office for Civil Rights, 2012, p. 12). For schools that expel students under zero-tolerance policies, the distribution of those exclusionary practices do have a disproportionate impact on certain groups of students. According to the Office for Civil Rights (2012), in schools that report using zero tolerance policies, Black/African American students account for 45% of the student body, but represent 56% of the students who are expelled under the administration of such policies.

The American Psychological Association formed a task force to evaluate the influence of zero-tolerance policies. The task force reported that such policies have a counter-productive effect on both academic performance and school climate (Graves & Mirsky, 2007). In fact, these types of policies do not result in substantive differences in behavior, and as a result do not show evidence of improving school climate or safety (Graves & Mirsky, 2007).

Potential Impact

Exclusionary disciplinary events can result in significant negative outcomes for students. Suspensions can result in academic deficits, leaving students with even one suspension at risk for delays in academic performance up to 5 years behind that of their non-suspended peers (Arcia, 2006; Davis & Jordan, 1994). Mendez (2003) conducted a longitudinal analysis to evaluate future outcomes for students who received out-of-school suspensions. The data revealed that students with more than one sixth-grade suspension

are less likely to graduate with their same age peers (Mendez, 2003). Further research has shown the students who have been suspended become less bonded to school, less invested in school rules and course work, and subsequently, less motivated to achieve academic success. Students who are less bonded to school may be more likely to turn to law-breaking activities and become less likely to experience academic success.

Consistent findings highlight the importance of school bonding for reducing the risk of delinquency (Hawkins et al., 2004). As a practice for reducing problematic behavior, suspensions do not reduce problem behavior over time. Hemphill et al. (2006) found that taking into account previous violent and aggressive behavior and a multitude of other risk factors (e.g. negative peer group, low grades), school suspension actually increased the risk of antisocial behavior a year later.

The over-reliance on exclusionary disciplinary practices, such as suspensions, continues to result in disproportionate impact for Black/African American students. As a result, these reductions in instructional time in the classroom might contribute to under-performance in educational measures (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Rausch & Skiba, 2004) and by proxy, less opportunity and fewer resources to achieve their full potential.

In light of the insights offered through comprehensive research efforts to document prevalence and contributing factors, Secretary of the United States Department of Education Arne Duncan (Office for Civil Rights, 2012) recently called for increased awareness of the implications of disproportionality and exclusion made evident by various forms of data. While the data offers one way to view the implications of the

disparities on the basis of race, Secretary Duncan maintains a vision of the broader implications for our society as he professed, “The undeniable truth is that the everyday educational experience for many students violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise” (Office for Civil Rights, 2012). The promise of American democracy is, and has always been, broken under the strain of such inequality.

Democracy

Democracy within the public school setting is a reflection of democracy in our society as a whole. The disparities, injustices, inequalities reflected in our society are produced and reproduced within our educational system (Bourdieu, as cited in McDonough & Nunez, 2007). To fulfill our democratic ideals, we must address racial inequality. One possible explanation for the conflict between democracy and racial inequality still present today is that economic viability has historically undermined democracy. Thus, capitalistic ideology overrides our society’s need to address the conflict between democracy and racism, and as a result, more than half a century after hopeful movements toward racial equality, the broken promises of democracy rattle like loose change in our pockets. Decades of data continue to reveal disparate conditions within schools on the basis of race. While democratic momentum within our society might be waning, education offers our only viable hope to safeguard freedom, ensure equality, and offer new visions of the democracy as the common promise that unites citizens of this country.

Conflict between Democratic Ideals and Racial Equality

Democracy is a broad, complex notion that can be difficult to conceptualize. Subject to interpretation and individualized expression, it has often been misperceived as merely a political construct, such as having voting rights that result in decisions supported by the majority. However, the essence of democracy is far more reaching and has more impact on the lived experience of our citizens. The protection of freedom and equality are daily encounters within a democracy, rather than specific events one would occasionally engage in, such as voting.

To conceptualize a working definition of democracy for this paper, insights will be drawn from contemporary theorists' revisionings of the words and work of John Dewey. Allison Kadlec asserts that Dewey outlined several core commitments essential for democracy. Democracy, according to John Dewey, is committed to "liberty of thought and action, equal opportunity to freely develop our capacities, and the cultivation of social intelligence" (as cited in Kadlec, 2007, p. 13). According to Richard Rorty, Dewey neither referred to democracy as related to "eternal values" nor "by reference to decreasing alienation," but rather as a "promising experiment" (as cited in Rorty, 1999, p. 119). Thus the enactment of democratic ideals are not fixed, but reflect the fluidity and flexibility of our ever-changing beliefs, values, and world. Hence, it is difficult to capture a fixed definition of such a socially and historically constituted construct, or even predict the outcomes of such efforts. However, the essence of social engagement within a democracy is premised, albeit in undefined terms, on the notion of equality. In order for democracy to thrive, there is a foundational understanding that all citizens are a part of

the system, and each citizen is regarded by both the system, and one another, as equal participants in the action or movement.

Herein lies the historical and current hypocritical conflict surrounding democracy in the United States. Cornel West proclaims, “From the birth of American democracy, then, the battle was raging over the scope of freedom, the reach of equality, and the tension between democratic and xenophobic elements” (West, 2004, p. 44). We have yet to truly observe or value equality for all citizens in our democracy. Perhaps it is easier to accept democracy as merely a political right, rather than a principle that guides social interactions equitably among all individuals, because our society has yet to fulfill the promise of equality.

Contributing Factors: Capitalism and Moral Bankruptcy

The hope of democracy and the promise of equality continue to be broken under the strain of an economic system that values profit and domination over people and partnerships (Eisler, 2008). According to Peter McLaren (2007), “democracy is in retreat” (p. 36). Americans have turned their backs on historical lessons and are now held captive by corporate interests and enslaved by the consumerism and capitalism (McLaren, 2007).

Giroux (2006) would support the view that notions of American democracy are vastly intertwined with economic interests. He suggests that notions of citizenship, while held dear, have often been in conflict with historical connects to “exclusionary legacies of class, gender, and racial inequality” (Giroux, 2006, p. 147). “Democracy has now been reduced to a metaphor for the alleged ‘free’ market” (Giroux, 2006, p. 148). Furthermore,

he suggests that democracy has not been lost altogether, rather, the spaces for democracy are no longer connected or reacting to the “contradiction and tension” between our current reality and “the promise of a reality to come” (Derrida, as cited in Giroux, 2006, p. 148). In terms of democratic governance, the state has the “responsibility of mediating between the market interests and the human interests, but has unfortunately, stripped itself of its rights to fulfill that role” (Giroux, 2006, p. 154).

American democracy has always been premised on a capitalist market-driven economy of prosperity, and just as our capitalism has always been subject to antidemocratic corruptions and has shut out so many from the fruits of prosperity, our political system has in turn been subject to capitalist corruptions. (West, 2004, p. 29)

Capitalistic values inherently focus on individualism, rather than social equality, and have historically undermined our democratic ideals on the basis of race and continue to this day, to open an ever-widening gap between races.

The values inherent to capitalism, value of profit and individual success, strangle space for moral engagement. With regards to decision making, a moral sense of obligation to respond in a particular way because it respects humanity is all but lost. This is particularly true when we consider the conflict between democracy and racial equality within a capitalist society. Manning Marable (2000) proclaims,

I remain convinced that Black people as a group will never achieve the historical objectives of their long struggle for freedom within the political economy of capitalism. Capitalism has shown the remarkable ability to mutate into various social formations and types of state rule, but its essentially oppressive character, grounded in the continuing dynamics of capital accumulation and the exploitation of labor power, remains the same. The U.S. capitalist state, in the final analysis, will never be cajoled or persuaded to reform itself through appeals of moral

suasion. Fundamental change will require a massive democratic resistance movement largely from below and anchored in the working class and among oppressed minority groups. (Marable, 2000, p. xxxviii)

History, Democracy, and Race

There have clearly been political and legal advancements made to address inequality in our country. As history can be cast and recast through contemporary lenses, one might currently be tempted to interpret the historical events as moral advancement, assuming they were brought about as a result of social consciousness and efforts to fulfill our democratic ideals of equality. However, regarding events such as the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves, and *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court decision which desegregated public schools, some would argue had nothing to do with morality or equality, but rather economics.

Derrick Bell (2004), one of the original founders of Critical Race Theory, contends that the basis for the Civil War was not solely abolitionist; rather, White laborers in the North found that their job security was threatened by essentially free labor practices maintained in the South by slavery. Further, he argues that the Emancipation Proclamation was, in part, enacted to economically weaken the Rebel forces in the south during the Civil War.

Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) was the law outlining legal access rights by race, stating that public facilities for African American citizens must be separate but equal. Bell (2004) contends that the “equal” aspect of this law was never enforced, and serves as an oversight in the enforcement of the subsequent legislation mandating desegregation. Bell asserts that *Brown* has not lived

up to its unprecedented reputation as the beginning of equality for African American students. Further, it was not a moral response to address inequality rather, it was in response to international pressure to address policies that conflicted with the U.S. democratic ideals. His historical analysis contentiously asserts that neither the Civil War nor *Brown* were about ending racial inequality and living out our democratic vision; rather, they were economic decisions that primarily serve the interests of White citizens, through “interest convergence” (Bell, 2004, p. 52). The central argument that was lost when *Brown* was mandated, according to Bell, was *equality*, which was never enforced under *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), nor has it been emphasized under *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). According to Bell, we have more segregated schools today, than when *Brown* was passed in 1954 (Bell, 2004, p. 127). African American students have lower levels of achievement (Gregory et al., 2010) and disproportionately receive higher rates of disciplinary responses (Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982) beginning documentation shows this significant discrepancy immediately following the enactment of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

Now more than ever, American democracy cannot continue to wait for equality to happen. Evidence of racial disproportionality and negative outcomes resulting from exclusionary practices must be recognized as the result of complex interactions within our society which erode the cornerstones of “freedom, democracy, and sustainable human development” (Annan, 2012, para. 1). In the nearly four decades since discovery, disciplinary disproportionality has remained constant, and has offered no reprieve in the borage of risk factors and exclusionary outcomes imposed on Black/African American

students. Efforts to ameliorate this impediment to our democratic ideals, must necessarily address race, as a historical factor which has shaped the social distribution of power within society, and more specifically schools.

Vision of Dissertation

This first chapter has been dedicated to the exploration of the concept of disciplinary disproportionality and the research that peels back the layers of factors that cannot fully account for its continued existence. Additionally, research has been presented to elucidate known factors associated with the disproportionality related to disciplinary outcomes across race. Educational access and democracy require exclusionary practices imposed upon students in a racially discrepant manner to be critically examined, particularly highlighting the historical contextual influence of race.

The next chapter will begin by exploring the social forces that are constructive and productive of our knowledge, experience, and identities. Social construction ideology also allows for the redefinition of racism and the additional clarification of racism as a system of power. This concept grounds societal understanding and awareness of race and racism, as both are implicitly connected to disciplinary disproportionality. Through these lenses, disciplinary disproportionality will be conceptualized as the result of socially constructed power structures existing with schools and broader society.

In the third chapter, I will introduce readers to the middle school where the study took place. Chapter III will also describe the research methodologies used to conduct the investigative inquiry.

Chapter IV will attempt to tell the story of disciplinary disproportionality for Olam Middle School by focusing on the Disciplinary and Structural Domains. First, the comprehensive disciplinary data analysis for the middle school will be presented. Trends in the data analysis revealing particular types of behavioral offenses occurring more frequently for students who are Black/African American will be utilized to guide a thorough examination of the potential impact of structural factors, such as school and district policies.

Chapter V will further examine the topic of disciplinary disproportionality as it relates to cultural beliefs. Data will be presented from a school-wide survey about student discipline, behavior, and race. Additionally, this chapter will offer a description of interpersonal factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. This chapter will conclude with critical insights about the Four Domains of Power as a model for examining disciplinary disproportionality.

The final chapter of this dissertation will not offer a conclusion, but rather a reflection of meaningful possibilities that can be gleaned from this research project. This chapter will offer potential explanations for the findings and limitations posed by the parameters of the study, but will also challenge readers to construct meaning in the manner most facilitative of change for her or him personally. This dissertation will end by discussing the beginning, a beginning point for exploring contemporary civil rights efforts in an attempt to achieve *disciplinary proportionality* and ensure the right of all students to receive an education.

Conclusion

At the time it first emerged, disciplinary disproportionality was embroiled in controversial and overtly racialized responses. Given the fluidity with which the concepts of race and racism have changed since the Civil Rights Era, the next chapter will continue the exploration of revised conceptualizations of race and racism and what they can reveal about how to conceptualize and ultimately respond to disciplinary disproportionality, while highlighting the influence of social construction and power.

CHAPTER II

POWER AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRUTH, DISCIPLINE, AND RACE

I am not interested in power for power's sake, but I'm interested in power that is moral, that is right and that is good. (King, Jr., n.d., para. 1)

Recognizing the challenges posed to our democracy by racism, it is critical to recognize the ways in which society and social systems are actively and passively maintaining the vestiges of racial inequality that continue to plague our society and our educational system. Decades of evidence revealing racially disparate conditions throughout the nation for Black students experiencing disproportionate disciplinary sanctions suggests the need to continue exploring the insidious influence of race, but through a broader lens that extends beyond dichotomies of systems or individuals. Race has profound influence in the lived experience of individuals because it is not merely about skin color; it is about power. This chapter will ground racism and discipline as socially constructed concepts created by and perpetuated through organized systems of power. First, the productive and destructive forces of knowledge and power will be introduced. Then, both discipline and racism will be explored as socially constructed concepts as they are impacted by power. The emergence of a new conceptualization of racism, color-blind racism will be posited as a contextually relevant view of contemporary race-related issues. This chapter will conclude by introducing a framework

for examining disciplinary disproportionality by evaluating the manner in which power is organized through disciplinary actions on the basis of race.

Power, Truth, and Discourse

All things are subject to interpretation whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth. (Nietzsche, n.d., para. 26)

Within the inquiry process to explicate the topics of discipline and race, it is logical to gather together what is known, or the “truth” about what these terms are and how they have been defined. In this process, the complex pieces of contextual conversations and scholarly publications do not reveal the “truth” for either subject, but rather, how forces of power shaped what can be known and said about each. Discipline and race do not exist on their own as things that can be definitively, objectively conceptualized. While they have come to be thought of as the way things are, they are none-the-less contextualized by social forces. Recognizing the implications of how social power is used to shape what is known and believed regarding these two topics has profound implications for addressing the disparate conditions that arise, not from the mere existence of discipline and race, but specifically from the ways in which these terms have been selectively used to maintain imbalances of power.

The concept of discourse implies “to ‘talk about’—to emphasize that knowledge is carried and reproduced through ‘talk’ and ‘writing’” (Saraga, 2001, p. 35). However, discourse is not just conversation; rather, it is “serious speech” or “what experts say when they are speaking as experts” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. xx). Michel Foucault’s view suggested that “each discourse is structured or organized around central themes and

investigation connections, and these define the terms in which statements can be made, investigations conducted, and conversations can take place” (as cited in Saraga, 2001, p. 35). Discourses are more than just spoken words; they “shape and become institutionalized in social policies and the organizations through which they are carried out” (Saraga, 2001, p. 35). Discourses do not occur in isolation. Schwalbe (2008) contends, “The making of the social world is always a collaboration; we can neither make nor remake anything social by ourselves” (p. 28), which suggests the act of naming is a collaborative social process. In this sense, the power to create discourse is minimized at the individual level.

“Truth,” or what is socially accepted as “the truth” for a particular society within a particular historically situated context, can in essence be constructed by various forms of discourse. Foucault (2006) explained, to excavate how knowledge came to be one can examine “what is given as the truth of observation or demonstration back on the basis of rituals, of the qualifications of the knowing individual, of the truth-event system” (p. 238). Further, he utilized genealogical research methodology to delve deeper into the basis of knowledge to examine “where the grounds of the true and the false come to be distinguished via mechanisms of power” (O’Farrell, 2007, p. 69). For Foucault, these explorations are heavily focused on the implications of defining and enforcing power. Thus, language and the formation of “truth” suggest the implication of power.

Foucault loosely defines power as “action on the action of others” (as cited in Flynn, 2005, p. 35). He further contends that power doesn’t actually exist as a “thing,” rather, “there are only individual relations of domination and control” (as cited in Flynn,

2005, p. 35). He cautioned that power should not be construed as a negative or bad concept. In his view, power is productive in our forms of knowing (Flynn, 2005).

Power can be viewed as having a “positive epistemic role,” as it is not only productive of knowledge, it serves to restrict and eliminate knowledge as well (Gutting, 2005, p. 51). Knowledge and power are intimately connected in this sense. Knowledge is both produced by and productive of the systems of power. Likewise, systems of power construct and respond to knowledge. For Foucault, such power structures are not productive of knowledge that could be considered “true,” given the power that shaped the knowing is contextual and relative (Gutting, 2005). Thus, our knowledge, including knowledge of the self, is not objective; it is relative to the sources of power by which it was shaped.

Modern forms of power are dispersed widely throughout society. While there are many clearly identifiable systems of power that impose their power on the lived experience of others, such as corporations, modern power is organized such that there is no one central location or source of power within society, or often within the particular organization itself (Gutting, 2005). There is no longer one group of identifiable privileged individuals “against which a marginalized ‘them’ is defined” (Gutting, 2005, p. 87). Like the mythical hydra, removing the “head” of one system of power, results not in liberation, but rather, the identification of another source of power. For this reason, Foucault believed that genuine liberation was impossible, as any revolutionary effort would face endless sources of power with vast networks of power distributed throughout social existence (Gutting, 2005). Given the broad implications of power in modern society, he

asserted that revolutionary efforts should be addressed locally, where they are most closely produced and deconstructed by local power sources (Gutting, 2005).

The expansive reach of power suggests that individuals can never be outside of systems of power. Language, knowledge, individual identity, and the systems themselves are shaped and molded via mechanisms of power. While individual identity is shaped and created by the names and the language we use, so too are the systems in which we are embedded. Individuals are never operating in isolation separately, for “one is always in the system” (Johnson, 2006, p. 35). Systems of power are the underlying roots of the oppression and privilege manifested in our social experiences (Johnson, 2006).

Within social systems meaning is constructed, these social constructions are “patterns of mutual expectations” that allow for the simplification of various social and behavioral interactions (Saraga, 2001, p. 29). Over time these “assumptions became habitualized” and “naturalized” and become recognized as “how the world is” (Saraga, 2001, p. 29). “The social order is produced and reproduced through the ways in which we enact these social constructions” (Saraga, 2001, p. 29). This term implies that the “social world is constructed- meanings are made, definitions produced and interpretations propounded” (Saraga, 2001, p. 39). This seems to suggest “the social world might be slightly less solid and permanent” (Saraga, 2001, p. 39). However, it would be a mistake to think that fluidity and changeability means that “all social constructions are fluid, changeable or intangible” or to suggest that social constructions do “not have real consequences for people as they live their lives” (Saraga, 2001, p. 39). That being said,

how discipline and racism as social constructions appear depend upon the sources of power engaged in the construction of either concept.

Discipline and Power

In *Discipline and Punishment* (1979), Foucault described the ways that society moved away from extremely harsh public displays of cruel punishments. Early in the eighteenth century, a movement began to discontinue public displays of punishments, which could reasonably be described as horrific and disturbing for viewers. At the time, such displays served the purpose of maintaining social order by communicating to observers the power and control of the punishers (Foucault, 1979).

Since bodies are considered to be extension of one's rights and simultaneously one's property (Foucault, 1979), later punitive efforts focused on controlling the human body to create order. Organizations seeking control over the masses began looking into "monasteries, armies, and workshops" and began a movement toward "meticulous control of the operation of the body" with an emphasis on mechanism, utility, and "docility" (Foucault, 1979, p. 137). The organization also looked at the increased power ascribed to evaluating "distribution of space" whereby surveillance was easily increased (Foucault, 1979, p. 141).

Punishments and rewards can be utilized in a system of social control. Foucault explained,

it is possible to quantify this field and work out an arithmetical economy based on it. A penal accountancy, constantly brought up to date, makes it possible to obtain the punitive balance-sheet of each individual. School 'justice', rudiments of which are to be found in the army and the workshops, carried this system very far. (Foucault, 1979, p. 180)

Checks and balances of socially defined “good” and “bad” behavioral demonstrations are a part of disciplinary systems constructed to maintain order.

While former punitive actions were carried out in full view of observers, control and power now recedes, and is carried out in a less visible fashion. This method of control can arise from what Foucault referred to as “ritualized examination” in which surveillance can be used to “qualify, to classify, and to punish” and by the nature of the institution, individuals are constantly visible; thus subjecting the individual to further domination based on the ever-present “gaze” (Foucault, 1979, p. 184). By focusing on the visibility of the individuals the exacting power of the system retreats to an invisible status.

This method of control and discipline, described by Foucault, concerns itself with spacing of bodies, architectural details, movements, and surveillance (Foucault, 1979). These efforts have created a process in which “domination [through] disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects” (Foucault, 1979, p. 187).

Foucault further explains:

Discipline may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology. And it may be taken over either by ‘specialized’ institutions (the penitentiaries . . .), or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals). (Foucault, 1979, p. 215)

Discipline is one manner in which power is exorcized to regulate the individuals behaviors. Discipline is imposed on individuals through “regulating the organization of

space (architecture etc.), of time (timetables) and people's activity and behavior (drills, posture, movement)" and is enforced through surveillance (O'Farrell, 2007). Discipline exerts power by normalization, or categorizing and organizing around definitions of normality (Ransom, 1997). By doing so, individuals are in essence expected to conform and be transformed into forms which are more useful and docile (Ransom, 1997).

Normalization became "one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age" (Ransom, 1997, p. 47). One location where this can be observed is in the classroom, in which "a mass of individuals is dispersed, individualized, and organized" with the goal of moving them [students] closer to the norm (Ransom, 1997, pp. 16–17).

Foucault characterized power associated with forms of discipline as "dangerous," citing that they are "diffuse, rarely formulated in continuous, systematic discourse . . . [and] often made up of bits and pieces" (Ransom, 1997, pp. 18–19). He further suggested that it should be resisted on the grounds that they impair an individual's ability "to form oneself as a subject of one's own activities" (Ransom, 1997, p. 143).

Deviance

Given the schools efforts to create disciplinary structures that control and normalize student behavior, subsequent efforts are needed to respond to those individuals and behaviors that do not conform. As a result, performances of behavior outside of the norm and in defiance of the disciplinary control result in being labeled "deviant" and are subject to punishment. Most importantly, the disciplinary system is imposed on everyone within a school setting, yet the efforts to address deviance are administered differently under the influence of race.

The school disciplinary structures have the power to determine, not only what is deviant, but also why deviance occurs. When interrogating disciplinary punishment as it relates to race, the responses offered tend to avoid the topic of race all together or place blame for the discrepancies on the students themselves.

A common institutional discourse about discipline and race suggests that “getting in trouble was not about race but a matter of individual choice and personal responsibility: each child made a choice to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 17). Further, assumptions are voiced which suggest “that it is the cultural difference kids bring to school that produces the existing pattern of punishment rather than institutional operations themselves” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 20). In essence, these ideological assumptions create a discourse of blame for the individual and prevents acknowledgement of the systemic power structures which perpetuate such differences.

Over time, various behavioral responses have been transformed from mere behavioral expressions to expanded assumptions related to more complex individual pathology. Rather than viewing a particular behavior as “troublesome” the current systemic discourse enacts the “psychologization” of the nature of the behavior; such that it is then viewed as “an individual disorder rather than one that is social and systemic” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 43). Another factor associated with confirming deviance based on race takes place when the behavior of Black/African American children is “adultified” or interpreted as “sinister, intentional, [and with a] fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naïveté” (Ferguson, 2001, pp. 77–83). Both “psychologization”

and “adultification” of Black/African American student behavior demonstrate the discourse and ideology ascribed by the school disciplinary system to explain “deviance.”

Teacher or other adult interpretation is also an important consideration for explicating deviance within schools. Many behaviors demonstrated by students are determined appropriate or punishable based upon interpretation. “Tone,” “non-verbal” communication, “body language,” expediency of response, and apparent “sincerity” significantly influence teachers’ perceptions of student behaviors and “attitude” and whether those behaviors will result in punishment (Ferguson, 2001, pp. 67–71).

Students are aware of the particular behaviors which are most likely to result in punishment. According to Ferguson (2001), students often put a great deal of effort into the “performance of obedience” (p. 71) and the construction of identity and impression that is less subject to controversial interpretation. Students are often aware of the need to do the behavior asked of them, but also recognize that how they engage in the behavior matters. Ferguson suggests that students recognize “the speed of compliance demonstrates the unthinking impulse to obey; hesitation implicate[s] that perhaps a decision is being taken about whether to obey or not and is seen as a clear challenge to relations of power” (p. 71).

Another common form of deviance is the demonstration of behaviors considered disruptive to the “norm” and standard procedures of the school day. Often behaviors punished captured under the description of “disruption” are “performances of the self” which are “highly ritualized with [their] own script, timing, and roles” (Ferguson, 2001, pp. 175–176). These performances often entail comedic and dramatic forms of self-

expression during which the student will “face-off” with the teacher or the position of power within the setting (Ferguson, 2001, p. 177). During these performances there is typically an “engagement with power; authority is teased, challenged, even occasionally toppled from its secure heights for brief moments” which “heighten tension, test limits, vent emotions, [and] perform acts of courage” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 177).

Punishment

School disciplinary systems are designed such that behaviors that are outside of the “norm” which might be labeled as “deviant” will likely result in punishment. It is important to recognize the potential impact of culture on the demonstrations of the behavior, as well as the implications of systemically punishing culturally influenced behaviors. According to Ferguson (2001),

It is important that we understand human culture differently- not as a set of immutable characteristics that seem to be transmitted through the genes but as a practical, active, creative response to specific social and historical conditions. As such, culture can be a significant mode of defense, of succor, of resistance and recuperation for those with few sources of power in society. (pp. 20–21)

Ann Ferguson (2001) conducted a longitudinal investigation of student behavior, discipline, and race which offers interesting insights into the practices and perceptions about who is being disciplined in schools and why. According to her findings, the problem arises when a particular culture is devalued and punished within racialized school structures.

Punishment is a fruitful site for a close-up look at routine institutional practices, individual acts, and cultural sanctions that give life and power to racism in a

school setting that not only produces massive despair and failure among black students that increasingly demonizes them. (Ferguson, 2001, pp. 19–20)

Exclusionary practices within the school settings that result in removal from the classroom to a separate space might be referred to as an in-school suspension or the “Punishing Room” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 40). Ferguson contends that while these sites are intended to serve as punishment, the use of punishments and the exertion of control further contributed to the identity development of the student. These sites are where “school identities and reputations are constituted, negotiated, challenged, confirmed for African American youth in a process of categorization, reward and punishment, humiliation, and banishment” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 40).

In general, conversations about discipline and race remain a controversial topic. Teachers, as we have seen, are willing to blame the disciplinary response on the student and remain reluctant to acknowledging or discussing the implications of race on disciplinary sanctions and punishments within the school or the socially constructed disciplinary system itself (Ferguson, 2001). Despite the teachers’ perception that discipline is not culturally or racially influenced, Ferguson suggests the “racial interpretation infusing several boys’ accounts of the school day was that African American boys were singled out for punishment because of their race” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 17). And, as it was discussed in the previous chapter, research continues to suggest that whether or not the disciplinary events themselves are racially or culturally influenced, the disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for Black students are nonetheless

disproportionate on that basis (Brooks et al., 2000; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Hinojosa, 2008; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011).

Power, through production and resistance, is evident in disciplinary actions. It is productive of relevant disciplinary practices, beliefs, and outcomes. It is also productive of social beliefs about student disciplinary issues and can have a tremendous impact on shaping student identity, through perpetuation of disciplinary actions as well as forms of resistance demonstrated by students, but not for everyone in the same way. Specifically, disciplinary disproportionality would suggest that these forces are disproportionately directed towards students who are Black/African American. Thus, the social narrative regarding discipline is intertwined with social conceptualizations based upon race.

Racial Identity

Identity is not singularly constituted. Racial identity is one aspect of the intricately "intertwined" identities of individuals which include class, gender, and sexual culture, as well as race and ethnicity (Bettie, 2003, p. 44). This limitation is acknowledged, given the almost exclusive focus on race within this paper. With the recognition that identity is multi-faceted and inclusive of multiple expressions of identity, the following section will focus on the social influences impacting racial identity. The topic of disciplinary disproportionality necessarily gives rise to factors associated with the racial identity of students and teachers.

Racial identity and racial consciousness are similar concepts used to explicate the various ways in which race is experienced and understood. While Racial Formation theory suggests the ways in which individuals and society make sense of and make use of

race, Racial Identity theory contends that individuals “develop racial identity by means of a sequential process in which increasingly more sophisticated differentiations of the ego evolve from earlier or less mature statuses” (Helms, 1996, as cited in Leach, Behrens, & LaFleur, 2002, p. 68). The developmental statuses of racial identity development are Contact-Denial, Disintegration-Disorientation, Reintegration-Distortion of Information, Pseudo-independence, Immersion-Emersion, and Autonomy (Helm, 1995, as cited in Leach et al., 2002). Racial identity has been found to correlate with racist attitudes (Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994).

In 2008 Dr. Janet Helms was interviewed by Dr. Allen Ivey about her book entitled *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have* (1992) which originally presented her theory of the stages of White Racial Identity. In the interview, Dr. Helms explained that each category is essentially a “schema” or a “way to organize information about race” (Microtraining Associates, 2008) and thought they are presented with a developmental orientation, they reflect a non-linear “dynamic” process that one can engage with or not. Life experiences and encounters with race and racism seem to be significant factors for transitioning through these various schemas. Contact is the initial schema, which reflects naivety and lack of awareness of the implications of race, or the privileges associated with being White. According to Helms (Microtraining Associates, 2008), Contact is the schema reflecting in her estimation, the level of White Racial identity for the majority of White/Caucasian individuals in our society. The second schema, Disintegration, takes place when the individual experiences confusion resulting from the recognition that there are moral responses that one might engage in with regards to race and simultaneously

recognizing that they are counter to the way one has been socialized (Microtraining Associates, 2008). Often individuals experiencing racial issues through this schema become aware of the potential loss of White privileges if one engages in the moral acts that contrast social teachings about how to engage with individuals of different races. Reintegration is the schema of White Racial Identity development that is an effort to reduce discomfort from recognizing occurrences of differential treatment and privileges by essentially blaming the less-privileged individuals for the difference (Microtraining Associates, 2008). In the next schema, Pseudo-Independent, White/Caucasian individuals are aware of racial differences and attempt to address racial differences (Microtraining Associates, 2008). The problem with this schema is that through their lack of awareness about racial issues, White/Caucasian individuals tend to reproduce White cultural structures. The Immersion/Emersion schema is reflective of White/Caucasian individuals expressing the notion that “racism, discrimination, power, [and] white privilege is a White problem” (Microtraining Associates, 2008). Within this schema, White/Caucasian individuals might express anger and frustration with themselves and with others in light of this new awareness and with their struggle to respond appropriately. The final stage is Autonomy, which is the “ideal” phase with a “humanistic orientation” that essentially values and appreciates genuine diversity in society (Microtraining Associates, 2008). Autonomy reflects an integration of “loving and liking oneself” and “others in one’s life space” (Microtraining Associates, 2008).

Theorists propose that White racial identity is not fixed, nor is it all-encompassing. Social identity theorists contend that similar to other forms of group

identity, White racial identity “forms in relation to other actors in an environment and is constantly subject to change” (as cited in McDermott & Samson, 2005, p. 250). Current efforts to expand our understanding of White racial identity “focus on whiteness as a situated identity, not as an identity of uniform privilege but as a complex social identity whose meaning is imparted by the particular context in which white actors are located” (McDermott & Samson, 2005, p. 249).

The attitudes about “others” expressed by White individuals come to be expressed through “White racial consciousness” which “refers to the ways that White people think about individuals whom they do not consider to be White/Caucasian, the racial outgroup” (as cited in Leach et al., 2002, p. 69). It is suggested that the attitudes about those not considered White develop in the same manner as other attitudes and also are subject to change “as a result of either direct or vicarious experience that is inconsistent or in conflict with previous attitudes” (Leach et al., 2002, p. 69). The line between racial consciousness and racial identity is somewhat of a challenge theoretically and methodologically to clarify. Given racial consciousness is a description of attitudes based on race, it is not easily seen as entirely separate from racial identity (Leach et al., 2002).

Wise (2010) “suggests a deep-seated and negative color-consciousness among large numbers of white Americans. This negative color-consciousness manifests both at the level of personal bias, or prejudice and with institutional mistreatment, in the form of discrimination” (p. 77). Thus, racial identity and racial consciousness can manifest in racial impact at the level of the individual and larger social structures. This is a particularly salient point in school settings in which teachers are predominantly

White/Caucasian, and the students they serve might be identified as a different race.

Understanding racial identity development for White/Caucasian teachers and staff members has significant implications for the creation and enforcement of the disciplinary structures previously discussed, which would typically normalize behavior according to the dominant group identity.

Identity development for individuals who are not White/Caucasian might be better understood through the concept of Collective Identity, which is a term used to describe a broader strand of identity associated with group belonging (Ogbu, 2008). This type of identity develops in response to “collective experiences” of and by the group or individuals identifying with the group (Ogbu, 2008, p. 31). According to Ogbu, in response to “external forces that mark a group of people as a distinct segment from the rest of the population,” some minorities as individuals and as a part of the collective group “develop a new sense of who they are, which is in opposition to their understanding of who the dominant group members are” (Ogbu, 2008, pp. 31–32). An “oppositional collective identity” is formed and maintained through these efforts to embrace and express the less socially accepted aspects of the collective identity (Ogbu, 2008, pp. 46-47). According to Ogbu, the most common expression of Black oppositional collective identity is reflected through the use of language and communication (Ogbu, 2008).

Associated with “collective identity” is the “cultural frame of reference,” which is used by minorities to “interpret the cultural and language or dialect differences between them and the dominant group” (Ogbu, 2008, p. 31). The work of Fordham and Ogbu

(2008) has further indicated that minorities also develop “oppositional cultural frames” which help “protect” their group identity and “maintain boundaries” between them and “the dominant group” (p. 599). The oppositional cultural frame of reference “is applied by minorities selectively” particularly targeted are those behaviors or events that are defined, evaluated, and rewarded by White culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 2008, p. 599).

A conflict arises in circumstances that require minority students to engage in behaviors that are deemed as “acting white” in accordance with dominant group expectations and are in conflict with or require a rejection of their collective identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 2008, p. 599). This resistance to “acting white” is not necessarily a rejection of achievement at large, but rather of “certain attitudes and behaviors conducive to making good grades because they interpreted them as ‘white’” (Ogbu, 2008, p. 89). Performance of behaviors and attitudes associated with being or acting “white” can result in emotional and psychological stress resulting from disapproval from peers and community, as well as feelings of guilt and betrayal based on perceived rejection of one’s own identity and cultural identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 2008).

Ogbu’s Cultural-Ecological Model (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998) contends that both the “societal and school factors” and “minority community factors” influence minority education and performance. The system of societal and school factors impact the experience and outcomes for minorities through educational policies, differential treatment, and disparities in the social rewards for accomplishments (Ogbu, 2008). The community forces reflect “dominant patterns of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors” for minority groups that provide a “frame of reference” against the dominant group,

“instrumental beliefs” about the value of education,” “trust or mistrust” toward school and the role of education in their oppression, and their “collective identity and oppositional culture” (Ogbu, 2008, p. 13).

The shaping of racial identity within schools and society is significantly related to power and the resulting ability to differentiate treatment on the basis of race. It is precisely this juncture between the school/societal system and the community or collective identity where black student identities are formed, normalized, or named as deviant. This process represents actions and interpretations which can lead to reproduction and resistance. Furthermore, the power structures organized within schools might be organized in such a way as to conceal the significant impact of race on the formation of identity for students and teachers. Thus, to critically examine the social construction of discipline and identity, we must now consider how race has been socially constructed as well.

Race and Power

Social and systemic forces associated with racism are inherently influenced by power. Discourse is one way to examine the ways in which power manifests itself and is utilized to produce certain ways of knowing and maintain domination and control within systemic structures. While it can be difficult to identify these aspects of systemic structures, it is important to recognize that individuals comprise the systemic structure, but not everyone has the same access to power, nor can everyone within the group create discourse. Identifying discourse and power structures related to the maintenance of racist

behavior and ideology is particularly important for offering the possibility of creating new anti-racist knowledge and discourse.

Examination of social and systemic structures associated with racism and their relation to the social construction and knowledge production via mechanisms of power reveal important details for grounding the concept of racism. As previously stated, systems are comprised of individuals. Each individual is not only socially constructed by the system but participates in the social construction of the system and society as well (Schwalbe, 2008). Racism is an issue wrought with complex interactions between social structures and the individual which manifest in various forms of social inequality in the United States. It is precisely this interaction between societal systems and the individual that makes racism a formidable oppositional force to equality. The construction of knowledge along with intricate connections to power contribute to the perpetuation and maintenance of racism in the United States.

Power, having been presented as a socially constructed concept, might foster a nebulous or abstract conceptualization instead of concretizing the very real impact it has on people's lives. Power has undeniably been allocated or revoked on the basis of skin color, which has insidiously deteriorated the quality of life and continues to perpetuate inequality and detrimental outcomes for Black/African American individuals in our schools and in broader society as evidenced by the adverse and inequitable outcomes of systems that claim to be "fair." Currently, Black/African American students are 2-3 times more likely to be suspended from school for disciplinary reasons (Brooks et al., 2000; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Hinojosa, 2008). In terms of school completion, only

60% of Black/African American students graduate from high school compared to 80% of White/Caucasian students (Children's Defense Fund, 2011). This lower graduation rate is similarly reflected in higher unemployment rates. In November 2010, only 43% of recent Black/African American high school graduates and 73% of Black/African American college graduates were gainfully employed (Children's Defense Fund, 2011). Another factor to consider is incarceration. In 2008, Black/African American youth was approximately 17% of the population (10-17), yet they accounted for 31% of all juvenile arrests and 58% of all juveniles sent to adult prisons (Children's Defense Fund, 2011). Astonishingly, one in nine (11.7%) Black/African American males between ages 25 and 29 is in prison or jail (Children's Defense Fund, 2011).

While there are arguably a great many variables associated with each of these extremely troubling statistics, no argument can reasonably conclude that race is not a factor associated with these differences. Race does in fact continue to have a significant impact on the lived experiences of individuals in our country today.

Construction of Racism

Racism is a socially constructed concept with roots in complex systemic and individual interactions. In order to explore the conceptualization of race and racism, first we must explore the factors that have shaped or constructed that basis of knowledge. Racism is "embedded in a capitalist system organized around competition over scarce resources, and organized to be white-dominated, white-identified, and white-centered" (Johnson, 2006, p. 104). However, manifestation of racism in patterns of individual and systemic behaviors reveals a symbiotic relationship.

Racism and other forms of oppression are not “personal problem[s] that can be solved through personal solutions” (Johnson, 2006, p. 152). We must examine the systems we create and maintain by our participation in them in order to enact socially just practices. Given “no social system lasts forever, and this fact holds especially for oppressive systems of privilege” (Johnson, 2006, p. 130), we must be aware of the fluidity and ever-changing nature of our participation in the social construction of systems of racism, and simultaneously our own identity. Thus, systems, awareness, identity, and racism, as well as definitions and interpretations provided herein, are all historically and contextually situated social constructions of knowledge.

Racism. To further demonstrate the social constructedness of race and racism, one only has to search for definitions of these concepts. Definitions of racism vary greatly and include and exclude varying concepts and themes such as the degree of power held by the expressing the person or group (Schwalbe, 2008), the concept of the body (Omi & Winant, 1994), the intention of the action (Johnson, 2006), demonstration of patterns (Johnson, 2006), and having no fixed meaning at all (Omi & Winant, 1994). Ultimately, the variation in interpretation and conceptualization opens a space to recognize the process of defining racism is inherently a socially constructed process.

Race, according to Omi and Winant (1994) is neither an “essence, as something fixed, concrete, and objective” nor is it a “mere illusion, a purely ideological construct” (p. 54). It is “critical to disrupt the fixity of these positions by simultaneously arguing that ideological beliefs have structural consequences, and that social structures give rise to beliefs” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 74). “Racial ideology and social structure, therefore,

mutually shape the nature of racism in a complex dialectical, and overdetermined manner” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 75). Moving away from binaries, and opening up the complexities associated with race, they offer the definition for race as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55).

Racial formation theory contends that “race has no fixed meaning, but is constructed and transformed sociohistorically through competing political projects, through the necessary and ineluctable link between the structural and cultural dimensions of race in the U.S.” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 71). A racial project is simultaneously “an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 56). The emphasis on the projects impacted by race creates a space to examine explicitly the impact that race has on the project. Thus, a “racial project can be defined as racist if and only if it creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 71).

“Racial formation” is constituted through the racial projects and “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55).

Omi and Winant (1994) further explain racial formation:

the theory of racial formation suggests that society is suffused with racial projects, large and small, to which all are subjected. This racial ‘subjection’ is quintessentially ideological. Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Thus are we inserted in a

comprehensively racialized social structure. Race becomes “common sense” - a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world. A vast web of racial projects mediates between the discursive or representational means in which race is identified and signified on the one hand, and the institutional and organizational forms in which it is routinized and standardized on the other. These projects are the heart of the racial formation process. (p. 60)

While Omi and Winant (1994) offer a definition of racism, they cautiously assert that “racism, like race, has changed over time” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 71). Thus, we can expect our understanding of racism to continue to change over time. “There can be no timeless and absolute standard for what constitutes racism, for social structures change and discourse are subject to rearticulation” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 71).

Systemic/Institutional

Efforts must be made to avoid binaries related to racism between individual and systemic or societal structures in order to open a space for further exploration of factors that perpetuate racism. However, systemic structures do have significant implications for the production and maintenance of racial beliefs and practices in our society.

Systems often make the individual actions that maintain racism and other forms of oppression less visible. Thus, we have difficulty creating accountability. One way this happens is through the act of “reification” which “keeps us from seeing who is doing what to whom, and how” (Schwalbe, 2008, p. 23). This practice attributes a “will” or “force” to concepts or objects, while veiling the choices made by actual people within the system (Schwalbe, 2008, p. 22).

Hegemony is another way in which systemic structures use political power to enact and maintain racism. Gramsci suggests that “hegemony was always constituted by

a combination of coercion and consent” and that “consent extended to the incorporation by the ruling group of many of the key interests of subordinated groups” (as cited in Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 67). Furthermore, in order to maintain “popular system of ideas and practices” strategies were utilized such as “education, the media, religion, folk wisdom, etc.—which he called ‘common sense’” (Gramsci, as cited in Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 67). Thus, some part of the systemic or social structure of racism likely carries within it valued beliefs and ideology held by members of society. Embedding those principles into systemic structures of racism can make the systemic structures more difficult to confront. Omi and Winant (1994) support this recognition, asserting “racial hegemony is ‘messy’” (p. 75).

To further complexify the issue of racism within systems, we must recognize the ways in which systems not only perpetuate racist ideology, but also impact power within the system to construct what we know and believe. Within a system, “not everyone has an equal say in deciding what is real and true, and truth bends toward power” (Schwalbe, 2008, p. 26). While language is a critical part of our human experience that guides our knowledge and understanding of ourselves and the world around us, the act of talking alone is not sufficient to set in motion the principles of “truth” within systems. How discourse is used to create social and institutional policy and systemic practices is impacted by power. In the current context, the distribution of power on the basis of race is no longer enforced via legal mandates and perpetuated in overtly racist expressions; it is far more nebulous.

Color-blind Racism

The denial of racism is a form of racism itself. (Tim Wise, 2008)

As we explored in the last chapter, our country had laws enforcing differentiated treatment on the basis of race, which were eradicated legally as recently as 1954 (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954) and 1964 (Civil Rights Act, 1964). Racism was legally enforced, socially accepted by the majority race, and institutionally maintained for more than three centuries in the United States. When the laws maintaining racism were removed, what happened to racism?

Given the fluid, socially constructed nature of racism, a contemporary social movement suggests the presence of a new form of racism. While color-blind racism might sound as though society has moved away from seeing color, this notion is nonetheless an expression of racism, albeit through new forms of communication and behavior, and most problematic within it is the seemingly innocuous denial of racism as an issue at all. Patricia Hill-Collins claims that our current societal desire to avoid appearing racist has contributed to the manifestation of color-blind racism. She asserts,

The myth of color blindness illustrates the strength of hegemonic ideas, a signature feature of the cultural domain of power. Hegemonic ideas are designed to justify these [occupational] patterns by convincing us that they are natural because that's the way it is, and because it's nature, there's no way to change it. (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 75)

In his book, *Racism without Racists* (2006), Eduardo Bonilla-Silva presents qualitative research on the new face of racism, color-blind racism. This new form of

racism includes “practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 3). Within this era of color-blind racism, “racial norms disallow the open expression of racial views, [and as a result] whites have developed a concealed way of voicing them” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 57). While avoiding overt verbal expressions of racism, White/Caucasian participants nonetheless conveyed racialized ideology in a “very careful, indirect, hesitant” and “coded language” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 55). Recognition of this change in the language and expression of racism is critical for our efforts to continue to name it as racism.

The four common frames related to “color-blind racism,” which “set paths for interpreting information” are “abstract liberalism,” “naturalization,” “cultural racism,” and “minimization” of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pp. 26, 28–29). These frames are often used to “explain a host of racial issues” and distort individual’s perceptions related to racial issues and serve as barriers to perceiving “racial reality” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 47). According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), “abstract liberalism” is the frame through which White individuals express the notion that “force should not be used to achieve social policy” (p. 28). In this regard, the emphasis is placed on equality in theory, but rejecting any necessary policy changes which would give the appearance of “preferential treatment” to minority groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28), and is used as an argument against equal opportunity measures. This frame is also premised on the value of individuals having choices. This can be observed when individuals are identifying reasons for segregated neighborhoods, for example, and this particular frame is used to suggest that it is the result of individual choice. “Naturalization” is the frame that allows

White/Caucasian individuals to explain race-related occurrences as though they are simply part of the natural order of things. This frame is used to “reinforce the myth of nonracialism” by implying racial events are driven, almost biologically or are dictated by innate natural forces (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). “Naturalization” can be observed in explanations about segregation, which suggest that individuals naturally “gravitate toward likeness” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). “Cultural” racism utilizes “culturally based arguments” to explain “the standing of minorities in society” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). These views appear to have replaced “biological views” about racial inferiority. When explaining discrepancies based on race, this offers a lens through which White/Caucasian individuals express cultural factors as the cause, such as “blacks have too many babies” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). Finally, “minimization” of racism is the frame that asserts “discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities’ life chances” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). This frame in particular is used to express the notion that racism is no longer an issue, and includes expressions that suggest minorities who think otherwise are “hypersensitive,” “using race as an excuse,” and playing the “race card” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 29). These frames are not used singularly, but in tandem with one another. They are also expressed by minorities, who have likely been inculcated through social experiences and interactions based on these racial beliefs. Given this elusive shift in the characteristics of this form of oppression, it is essential to consider how racism and racist ideology is currently being expressed and justified within schools.

The Four Domains of Power

Racism is much more clandestine, much more hidden kind of phenomenon, but at the same time it's perhaps far more terrible than it's ever been (Davis, 2010). Expanding the notion of color-blind racism, Patricia Hill Collins asserts that racism can be considered to have more than merely individual and systemic constructs. She contends "racism is a system of power with four domains," which are: Structural, Disciplinary, Cultural, and Interpersonal (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 53). The Structural Domain reveals "how racism as a system of power is set up" and "organized" through "social institutions" (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 53). The Disciplinary Domain can be found "where people use the rules and regulations of everyday life to uphold the racial hierarchy or to challenge it" and is organized through "bureaucracies" and relies on "surveillance" (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 53). The Cultural Domain "manufactures the ideas that justify racial hierarchy" by "constructing representations, ideas, and stories about race and racism" (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 53). The final domain, the Interpersonal Domain, "shapes race relations among individuals in everyday life," whereby during "ordinary social interactions" individuals "accept and/or resist racial inequality" in their lives (Hill-Collins, 2009, pp. 53–54). Racism is "produced and resisted within each domain of power as well as across all four domains" (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 55). This particular expansion of the concept of color-blind racism in America is a significant contribution to the redefinition of racism. Awareness of the domains of power provide "new language" to move beyond "either/or thinking that paints racial inequality as caused by either institutional or personal factors" (Hill-Collins, 2009, pp. 52–53).

Furthermore, this framework situates contemporary racial issues within a complex set of forces, which necessarily requires examination of the way these complex forces culminate in evidence of racial inequality. By recognizing the evolution of racism into color-blind racism, finding a way to examine how power is organized on the basis of skin color is essential for redressing racial inequities. It would be fruitless to attempt to discuss racism directly in contemporary settings, given the frequent contention that society is now non-racial. Thus, where race continues to require examination, efforts must necessarily be altered to capture the expressions which appear non-racist, but are instead evidence of color-blind racism.

The Four Domains of Power (Hill-Collins, 2009) offer an invaluable lens through which the intersection of racism and discipline can be explored. First, by grounding color-blind racism as a “system of power,” it opens racism to broad reaching exploration of multiple factors and forces which have a potential impact on how power is distributed within the system on the basis of race. Second, racism has a profound impact on the lived experience of individuals not because of the color of their skin, but because of the way access to power is attributed or denied on that basis. Thus, power is a critical concept related to exploration of racial and disciplinary issues, such as disciplinary disproportionality which is impacted by power structures within both socially constructed systems.

Framework for Examining Disciplinary Disproportionality

There are many complex inter-related factors that could reveal interesting insights about disciplinary disproportionality within schools. Researchers and theorists have

described several factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality which appear to correspond to the Four Domains of Power described above as they relate to color-blind racism (Hill-Collins, 2009). These factors include the implementation and interpretation of disciplinary structures and practices (Disciplinary Domain; Ferguson, 2001), policies and regulations regarding behavior (Structural Domain; Giroux, 2006), and culturally biased expectations (Cultural and Interpersonal Domain; Monroe, 2005). It would be beneficial to understand any connection or correspondence between factors influencing disciplinary disproportionality and the domains of power, which can offer insight into the potential impact of color-blind racism. Specific to the topic of disciplinary disproportionality, it is possible that there might be fewer factors than those outlined in the existing Four Domains of Power model. It is also possible that another domain not currently described in the Four Domains of Power model could be associated with the organization of power structures regarding race and discipline. It would be a valuable contribution to the literature to reveal how each of these factors specifically relate to disciplinary disproportionality and how each domain can be examined for acceptance and resistance of the existing disproportionate practices or beliefs.

In order to better understand the complex systems of power organized on the basis of race possibly resulting in disproportionate disciplinary outcomes, a comprehensive study of disciplinary disproportionality was conducted at one middle school. The purpose of the investigation is to tell the story of disciplinary disproportionality at this particular school, with an emphasis on the ways in which power is organized through policies, disciplinary practices, cultural beliefs, and interpersonal interactions on the basis of race.

To this end, I draw from the conceptualization of race and color-blind racism proposed by Omi and Winant (1994) and Hill-Collins (2009), respectively, to define racism as a system of power organized on the basis of skin color. Further, I draw from Foucault (1979) to assert that discipline within school settings is also a system of power used to normalize and control human behavior. Therefore, the topic of disciplinary disproportionality must necessarily examine systems of power and the disparate results that occur on the basis of skin color. This research is guided by the following research questions:

- What can be revealed about disciplinary disproportionality by examining it through disciplinary, structural, cultural, and interpersonal domains (the Four Domains of Power) within one school setting?
- What are the beliefs and practices that contribute to disciplinary disproportionality?
- How are acceptance and resistance of disciplinary disproportionality enacted within disciplinary, structural, cultural, and interpersonal domains (the Four Domains of Power) within one school setting?

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the socially constructed nature of discipline and race, particularly highlighting the influence of power associated with both concepts. The fluid redefinition of racism in contemporary contexts has resulted in the emergence of the concept of color-blind racism. This expression of racism attempts to appear non-racial and is organized by domains of power, which can be conceptualized into four distinct

domains. The framework of the Four Domains of Power (Hill-Collins, 2009) offers a structured way to examine the implication of power as it relates to race and discipline. The next chapter will introduce the middle school where the study took place and describe the relevant characteristics and demographic details of the setting. Chapter III will also provide a description of the research methodology applied to this research endeavor.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research used mixed methodology to explore the topic of disciplinary disproportionality at one middle school in central North Carolina. Specifically, the investigation included a comparison of disciplinary referrals for specific behaviors and risk ratios by race; an analysis of relevant disciplinary policies was also completed to determine any implications related to disproportionality. In addition, the school staff participated in an on-line survey ($n = 25$) to evaluate staff perceptions of student behavior, discipline, and race and staff interviews ($n = 7$) to validate the interpretation of findings from the previously mentioned sources. This chapter will introduce the school selected to participate in the research study, as well as the criteria that guided the selection process. Additionally, procedures are described related to each of the data collection strategies, approach to analyses, and description of the respondents.

Research Site Description

Olam Middle School is located in the southeastern region of the United States and serves grades six through eight. The school is nestled in the country-side on the outskirts of a mid-sized school district. Most accurately, this school would be described as rural, as it has traditionally served only a very small, but solidly middle-class community and the bucolic homes geographically dispersed throughout that particular part of the county.

When asked to describe the school, most often the words “traditional,” “conservative,” and “white” were descriptors.

Demographics

During the 2011-2012 school year 612 students were enrolled in Olam Middle School. Of the 612, 63% are White/Caucasian, 21% are Black/African American, 10% are Hispanic, 5% are multi-racial, and less than 2% are American Indian, Asian, or Pacific Islander. Data from the 2010-2011 school year indicate that 28% of the students at Olam Middle School were eligible to receive Free Lunch services and an additional 8% were eligible for Reduced- price Lunches. Olam Middle School has a 95% attendance rate, which is consistent with the state average (NC School Report Cards, 2011).

Teachers

There are 44 teaching staff members at Olam Middle School, which includes not only the grade-level teachers of core content, but also the Exceptional Children Service teachers, teacher assistants and elective subject teachers. Of the 44 teachers, 93% are White and 7% are Black or African American. The majority are also female (70%), with only 30% being male.

The teaching staff overall brings a great deal of experience and expertise to their roles as teachers. Of the 39 grade-level teachers, 100% are fully licensed and highly qualified (NC School Report Card, 2011). According to the data on the NC School Report Card (2011), 15% of teachers at Olam Middle School have advanced degrees, which is below the district (21%) and state (27%) average. More than half (51%) of teachers at Olam Middle have 10 or more years of teaching experience. Thirty-one

percent have between 4 and 10 years of experience and 21% have 0 to 3 years of experience. In addition to the tendency of having more years of experience, the staff turnover rate for the school is 3%, which is significantly below the district and state teacher turnover rate, which is 13% for both.

Staff

While there are only 44 teaching staff members, there are 53 total staff members. This number includes counselors, social workers, psychologists, a School Resource Officer, other support staff, and administrators. Of the 53 full and part-time staff members, 89% are White and 11% are Black. A majority is also female (72%). The school hired a new principal in the 2011-2012 school year. The new school administrator previously served as an assistant principal at a different school location within the district for 4 years prior to taking this role as principal at Olam Middle School. The 2011-2012 school year was her first year as a school principal. There are two assistant principals at Olam Middle School, one Black/African American female and the other a White/Caucasian male. Both worked at Olam for the previous three years.

Academic Profile

Olam Middle is regarded as a school with a high level of achievement. For the 2010-2011 school year the overall percentage of students who passed the reading and math End of Grade test was 71.8%. The percent of passing scores for minorities was much lower. While 82.3% of white students passed both tests, only 55% of Hispanic students and 49.3% of Black students passed the reading and math End of Grade tests (NC School Report Cards, 2011). Olam has earned the title “School of Distinction”

which means that 80-90% of students are performing at their grade level for state ABC assessments (NC School Report Cards, 2011). Only 29% of all schools in the state have earned such a designation.

Research Site Selection Criteria

Olam Middle School was selected for participation in this research project by meeting the following criteria:

- having evidence of disciplinary disproportionality (based on a preliminary comparison of racial demographic data for the school compared to the percentage of referrals received by each race based on the Office Discipline Referral Data submission from the previous year) and,
- being a middle school in order to have sufficient numbers of disciplinary incidents (middle schools tend to have higher rates than elementary schools and high school data tends to show a decreasing trend as students with higher disciplinary encounters are thought to drop out before graduation) and
- having administrator support for participation in the study in order to ensure support of all data collection efforts

The school selected to participate in the research project was recruited by first examining existing discipline data from the previous school year (2010-2011) to determine if the school had evidence of disciplinary disproportionality. Administrators at schools within the district with disproportionality were contacted to determine interest in participating in the study. A meeting was scheduled to discuss support for the research project, verify disciplinary data, and create a plan for collecting data for the research project. The school

principal at Olam Middle was interested and eager to participate and support the research project. As a result, Olam was selected as the site for conducting this study of disciplinary disproportionality.

Relationship to Research Site

Outside of my role as a student investigator, I am employed by the Department of Public Instruction as the Regional Positive Behavior Support (PBIS) Coordinator. I work with 15 school districts in the central region of North Carolina. As a result, I have an existing relationship with the school district in which the selected school is located and I have provided training and support to many of the schools within the district regarding discipline and behavioral concerns. I have not worked directly with the selected school that participated in the research project. In response, I fully disclosed my role as a regional PBIS coordinator and my role in the local district to the district representatives, administrators, and all staff members. While this research topic and data collection are not inconsistent with my existing professional role, I attempted to clearly disclose that the purpose for the research project and data collection are related to my role as a student.

Procedures

This study was designed to evaluate disciplinary disproportionality by examining it through the four Domains of Power (Hill-Collins, 2009). For the purpose of this study each of the domains was defined as it relates to the topic of discipline. The Disciplinary Domain was defined as the disciplinary rules, expectations, and procedures within the school. The data used to investigate this domain were intended to evaluate the disciplinary data, which included disciplinary events and outcomes, as well as classroom

factors, surveillance, teacher variations, and student behavioral factors. The Structural Domain was defined as the policies that govern disciplinary practices and procedures within the school. The data related to the various policies were intended to explore consistency and clarity within and across the different policies, as well as staff perceptions about the clarity and consistency of the policies in general. The Cultural Domain was defined as the beliefs about students' culture that contribute to or maintain discrepant outcomes for students who are Black/African American. The data relevant to this domain were intended to measure staff perceptions of racial, cultural, class, gender, and ability-related factors perceived as contributing to disciplinary disproportionality, as well as the beliefs staff held about students' and their families' values. The final Domain, Interpersonal, was defined as characteristics and descriptions of the relationships between teachers and Black/African American students. Data relevant to this Domain were designed to evaluate evidence of meaningful relationships between staff members and Black/African American students according to teacher perceptions.

A variety of strategies were employed to collect the data necessary to evaluate disproportionality across each of the Domains. The following sections explain in detail the data and analysis procedures.

Discipline Data

The discipline data for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years for Olam Middle School was exported from the disciplinary database system. The data from the 2010-2011 school year were only extracted to determine if the school had documented evidence of disciplinary disproportionality, which was specified within the eligibility

criteria for participation in the study. All analyses of disciplinary data involved data from the 2011-2012 school year. These data were used to examine types of behavioral offenses, disciplinary outcomes, and frequency of referral by race. The data extraction also provided data that were analyzed to calculate the risk ratio and risk index for Black/African American students. Additionally, data were analyzed to determine rate of referral by teacher. In summary, the data extraction included race, types of behavior, locations, date, and referring teacher, as well as type and length of consequence for all documented disciplinary incidents occurring during the respective school year.

Disciplinary data from the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school year (through February) which demonstrated evidence of disciplinary disproportionality for both years, despite a decreasing trend in overall numbers of referrals, were presented to all staff members during a staff meeting in February. This was done to ensure staff awareness of the issue of disciplinary disproportionality within the school prior to recruitment for participation in the survey and subsequent interviews.

The data were exported from the selected school's disciplinary database (NCwise) into Excel and SSPS for summative evaluation including descriptive analysis and reporting frequency differences for behavioral offenses by race. The titles of the fields included in the data export from NCWise were: student ID #, race/ethnicity, grade, incident date, action length, incident narrative, incident reason, action type, action length, action location, incident reported by, discipline site, and incident occurred time. Student names were not exported in order to protect student identity. Student identification numbers were exported in order to calculate the number of repeat referrals received by

any given student. Teacher identifying information was exported in order to summarize the number of referrals by teacher. Teacher identity was kept confidential, although no individual data were reported. Only the summary data for describing discipline overall at the school were presented.

Discipline data analyses. Using the 2011-2012 disciplinary data the following analyses were conducted:

- Calculated risk index and risk ratio for office disciplinary referrals
- A Risk Index is the “percentage of a racial/ethnic group of individuals being a part of a specific category” (The Equity Project, n.d.). The Risk Index helps to answer the question, “What is the risk for Black/African American students to be referred to the office for disciplinary reasons?” A “Risk Ratio is a comparison of the risk index for a certain racial/ethnic group to the Risk Index for all other racial/ethnic groups” (The Equity Project, n.d.). The Risk Ratio helps to answer the question, “How much more likely are Black/African American students than White/Caucasian students to be referred to the office for disciplinary reasons?”
- Reported the number of referral by teacher
- Examined the number of office discipline referrals, Out of School Suspensions (OSS), In-school Suspensions (ISS), and Expulsions by race. Specifically, differences between Black/African American students and White/Caucasian students were examined.

- Conducted a frequency count of disciplinary code violation/citations for Black/African American students and White/Caucasian students.

Types of Behavioral Offenses

In order to more efficiently summarize the behavioral incident data, three categories of disciplinary behavior were created, Non-violent, Violent/Criminal, and Other. The categories were created by examining the 2006-2007 Annual Report on School Crime and Violence (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2007). This report lists 17 criminal acts, 10 of which are considered dangerous and violent. This list of 17 behaviors was used to create the list of “Violent/Criminal” behavioral category. The “Non-violent” category was created by examining the remaining list of behaviors in the disciplinary data system and policy for behaviors that do not involve others or impact others. The third category of “Other” was created to capture the remaining list of behaviors, which might not be criminal or violent, but might potentially impact others or could be viewed as more serious than “Non-violent.” This categorization of behavioral offenses was used in both the disciplinary data analysis, as well as the policy analysis.

Policy Data

Based on the disciplinary data analyses, all policies related to student discipline were examined to better understand how they influence disciplinary practices resulting in disproportionate outcomes for Black/African American students in particular. A language crosswalk across the policies was created to identify consistency, reflected by having similar behaviors listed, defined, providing examples, and describing consequences. The purpose of this analysis was to determine how clear and consistent the policies are

regarding the specific behaviors most frequently associated with disciplinary disproportionality.

Policy descriptions. There are three different policies and one disciplinary documentation tool that are utilized by Olam Middle School. The first policy is the school district “2011-2012 Student Code of Conduct.” This policy is distributed to students each year throughout the entire school district. All parents/guardians are required to sign and return a verification document indicating they have read and understood the district code of conduct. The document is 31 pages and lists policies related to student transfers, parental notices, athletic eligibility, a directory of schools, and inclement weather, as well as 26 specific Rules of Student Conduct.

The “Olam Middle School 2011-2012 Faculty/Staff Handbook” is the second document outlining disciplinary policies and procedures. This document is disseminated to all staff at the beginning of the school year or at the time the staff member joins the school staff. This is a comprehensive 74-page document, specifically to support the faculty/staff members at Olam Middle school. It explains dates, duties and responsibilities, discipline, school safety, attendance procedures, and finance-related matters relevant for faculty and staff at the school.

The third document is the “Student Handbook” which documents policies and procedures specific to Olam Middle School for students and parent/guardians. This handbook, along with the district “Student Code of Conduct” are sent home with each student when they enroll or begin the school year. The “Student Handbook” outlines information about inclement weather procedures, conferences, visitors, activity eligibility

requirements, grades and report cards, and the disciplinary policies for Olam Middle School as they relate to the broader district “Student Code of Conduct.”

In addition to these policies, Olam Middle School utilizes “Student Planners” to assist students with organization and documentation of assignments, as well as provide a way to communicate with parents about student homework and behavior. I am referring to the planner as a disciplinary documentation tool, as it does not describe or list any policies or procedures related to discipline, but rather is used to document specific behavioral offenses. The planner only lists three specific behavioral violations, which are “Non-compliance,” “Disruption,” and “Disrespect.” Parents are asked to review the planner daily and sign it at least weekly. Students keep the planner with them throughout the day. Only behavioral violations falling under the three previously mentioned categories are recorded in the planner. This document is included in the policy analysis, as it includes disciplinary-related language and it is the most visible document to students throughout the school year.

The database system used to collect information about disciplinary incidents has yet another set of behavioral descriptors. While the database is not policy, it was included in the examination of structural factors, given the language used in the system must necessarily be used to evaluate disciplinary data and the behavioral offenses listed in the database have an impact on the interpretation of disciplinary data. In addition, discrepancies in language can lead to incorrect documentation of behavioral incidents.

Policy analysis. To examine the various policies related to discipline, a crosswalk of the various disciplinary policies for Olam Middle School was created. The policies

included in the crosswalk were the District 2011-2012 Student Code of Conduct, the Olam Middle School Student Code of Conduct, the Olam Staff Handbook, and the Olam Middle Student Planner. While the disciplinary database used to collect and summarize disciplinary data is not policy, it was also included in the crosswalk to examine consistency in language with the policies.

The crosswalk was created using an Excel spreadsheet. It started with the 26 specific behavioral violations listed in the District 2011-2012 Student Code of Conduct, as it was referred to as the primary disciplinary policy guiding all disciplinary actions for the school. Thus, all other documents were compared to the district policy. Any behaviors included in the Staff Handbook, the Olam Student Code of Conduct, or the Olam Student Planner were first examined for similarity to the District Code of Conduct. Next, any behaviors that were not clearly or closely related to behaviors described in the District Code of Conduct were added to the crosswalk. Once items were organized to reflect similarities and differences in behavioral descriptions across the policies, a numerical value was assigned to each behavior listed within each policy to indicate clarity and specificity of the information provided. The values are as follows: 0 = not listed; 1 = listed; 2 = listed and outlines consequences; 3 = listed and defined; 4 = listed, defined, and offers examples; 5 = listed, defined, and outlines consequences; and 6 = listed, defined, outlines consequences, and offers examples. The total possible points for the District Code of Conduct, Staff Handbook, and Student Code of Conduct would be 6 points per policy. The student planner and the disciplinary database system only list behaviors and therefore each has only a possible 1 point value. Thus, the total number of

points possible per behavior would be 20. The types of behavioral offenses were grouped into three categories: Non-violent, Violent/Criminal, and Other to assist with summarizing the types of behavioral offenses included within each of the policies.

Based on the student disciplinary data analysis, the particular behavioral offenses that appear to be most implicated in disciplinary disproportionality were traced to the particular school and district code of conduct in order to conduct a critical examination of the language and clarity within the policy or regulation. The disciplinary policy analyses examined the student disciplinary handbook and district/school code of conduct to try to identify the policy/practice that is most cited in the disciplinary data connected to disciplinary disproportionality.

Staff Survey

All staff members at the school were invited to participate in an online survey to evaluate their beliefs about student behaviors, student race, and disciplinary procedures at their school. This included teacher assistants, support staff, and itinerant staff. This offered a comprehensive view of discipline from a variety of perspectives. All staff received a brief explanation of the survey from the student researcher and administrator during a staff meeting or via email. Following the initial announcement, staff received an email invitation to participate in the survey. The email provided informed consent, explained the voluntary nature of the survey, and included the link to the online survey. The survey was open for completion for a 5-week window of time. Given the nature of online surveys, the staff survey was conducted at a time and location convenient to the participants during that window of time.

A total of 25 staff members responded to the survey providing an overall response rate of 47%. The survey respondents were 82% White/Caucasian and 7% were Black/African American. Eleven percent identified their race as "Other." None identified as Hispanic, Asian, or Bi-racial. This sample is reasonably close to the demographic makeup of the school staff, which is reported to have 89% White/Caucasian and 11% Black/African American staff members. Eighty percent of respondents to the survey were teachers, 12% were student services support (e.g. Counselor, psychologist, etc.), 4% were teacher's assistants, and 4% listed Other as their role in the school. The majority of respondents to the survey tended to be relatively new to the school. Thirty-six percent reported having served that particular role in Olam Middle for 1-3 years and 18% for 4-7 years. For the staff having served at Olam for a longer period of time, 7% had served for 8-12 years, 21% for 13-20 years, and 7% for more than 21 years. The length of time the respondent had served in their role overall revealed 11% served for 1-3 years, 25% served for 4-7 years, 14% served for 8-12 years, 25% served for 13-20 years, and 14% served for more than 21 years, suggesting that while some of the staff members might have fewer years of experience at Olam Middle School, they bring additional years of service in similar roles from other school locations.

Survey completion was anonymous but included a few demographic questions about length of time as a teacher, race, and grade-level. The remaining questions on the survey asked for Likert Scale ratings of 1-5 indicating a range from Strong disagreement to Strong agreement with each statement. A copy of the survey instrument is located in

Appendix A. The survey data were collected via a secure online survey support website and exported into Excel and SSPS for analysis.

Four domains of power subscales. The items on the staff survey have been organized to create four subscales reflecting measures that correspond to each of the four Domains of Power (Hill-Collins, 2009): Disciplinary (items 4-14, 37, 38), Structural (items 1-3, 21), Cultural (items 17-19, 22-24, 30-34), and Interpersonal (items 16, 20, 27, 29, 35, 36). Items 1-3 and 35-38 were reverse scored in order to create consistency in the values. A higher mean values for the domain subscales indicates respondents strongly perceive items within that domain to be problematic or having a significant impact on disciplinary disproportionality.

Staff survey analysis. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the four Domains was reported for the overall survey responses. In addition, correlations were conducted to examine the relationship between each of the Domains and Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was computed to evaluate the variance across repeated measures for the subscales. Further, two additional ANOVAs were conducted to examine Domain scores by years of experience in the school and by race to evaluate differences in perspectives across these two groups of respondents.

Interviews

Volunteers were recruited from Olam Middle School to participate in seven staff member interviews. All staff members received a brief explanation of the administrator and teacher interviews from the student researcher and administrator during a staff meeting at the same time the staff survey was explained. A follow-up email was

disseminated by the student researcher and the school administrator inviting 4-6 teachers and the school administrators to participate in confidential interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured, took place on one occasion, and ranged from approximately 60-90 minutes in length. The number of in-depth interviews was limited to seven in order to ensure feasibility within the scope of this research project. A copy of the semi-structured interview is located in Appendix A.

Primarily, each of the interviews served as a way to verify my interpretations and analysis of the disciplinary data, policy analysis, and survey responses. Secondary to verifying my interpretation of other data measures, the interviews served as a way to delve deeper into each of the Four Domains of Power to assist with general analysis and uncovering evidence of acceptance and resistance within each. The focus of the interviews was to collect data regarding staff understanding of disciplinary disproportionality, as well as their beliefs regarding cultural, relational, and policy-related factors associated with the disciplinary outcomes for the school. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The interviewer also recorded data in a written format with notes and observations during the interview.

Interviewees. In order to protect the identity of the interviewees the descriptions will be organized by descriptor rather than individual. Four teachers, including two grade level teachers and two elective subject teachers participated in the interviews. One school counselor, one assistant principal, and the principal were interviewed as well. Six of the interviewees identified their race as White/Caucasian and one participant's race was identified as Black/African American. The years of experience in their roles ranged from

1 to 12 years. The length of time serving in that role at Olam Middle school ranged from 1 year to 10 years. Four of the interviewees were female and three were male.

When quoting interviewees, no description indicating which interviewee made the statement will be used in order to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. A vague description of the interviewee might be offered in instances when it is pertinent to the particular quote, but it will not provide details that would compromise the individual's confidentiality.

The beliefs shared by interviewees may or may not be an expression of their own beliefs, as interviewees were most often asked to explain the beliefs and perceptions of other staff members as represented in the Staff Survey data. Interviewees were encouraged to respond in this way to increase openness about expressing less socially-desired responses about controversial and racialized topics, when they will not directly be identified as one's own belief. This was also done in practical terms to validate the results of the survey and gather any relevant information and experiences that substantiate the responses offered by the staff as a whole. In many responses, it is evident that the interviewees did share their own beliefs about the topic. As much as possible, the difference between the interviewees' beliefs and their projected beliefs about other staff members will be described within the presentation of findings.

Interview analysis. Qualitative data analysis was conducted by organizing themes emerging from the interview data as they relate to the original research questions. First, each of the interviews was reviewed to begin to formulate themes as they relate to the Four Domains of Power. Next, a legend was created to color code the content of the

interviews according to those themes. An Excel spreadsheet was used to further organize the data related to each of the themes. The primary themes were the Four Domains of power (Disciplinary, Structural, Cultural, and Interpersonal). The secondary themes that emerged from the data analysis in relation to the Four Domains of power were Consistency, Difference in tolerance, Exempted goodness or Denial, Race/Racism, Families, Culture, Disruptive Behavior, Volume and language, Disproportionality, class and gender, Change something, Academic struggles, and General. Then data were organized as they relate to each of the four Domains of Power and the sub-themes. Data were numerically organized to reflect the particular theme and subtheme.

As no follow-up interviews or inter-rater reliability was possible for this research, I made every attempt to verify my interpretations during the interviews. While the interviews offer a tremendous amount of information about disproportionality, the primary reason for conducting the interviews was to verify my interpretation of the Staff Survey, Policy Analysis, and Disciplinary data analysis. For this reason, the interview results will be used primarily to substantiate the interpretation of the other data sources. There are several significant factors that emerged from the interviews that were not captured in the other data sources. These results will be reported in the corresponding domain.

Summary

A variety of methods were used to triangulate data across each of the Four Domains of Power. Rather than each of the data collection methods corresponding to one particular Domain of Power, the Staff Survey and the Staff Interviews provided data for

all four domains. The Disciplinary Data Analysis and the Policy Analysis were most directly related to the Disciplinary Domain and the Structural Domain, respectively, although, it should be noted that the findings from these particular analyses informed the content and responses to data collected across each of the other Domains. Therefore, data from each of the various collection methods will be presented within each Domain to explore artifacts, practices, staff perceptions, and staff beliefs in order to provide a comprehensive assessment of disciplinary disproportionality. The following chapter will present findings for the Disciplinary and Structural Domains.

CHAPTER IV

DISCIPLINARY AND STRUCTURAL DOMAINS

The voice of the majority is no proof of justice. Frederick von Schiller

Disproportionate distribution of power through its very existence results in disproportionate outcomes. To explore the occurrence of disciplinary disproportionality, the existing power structures within the school setting must necessarily be examined. In order to offer an in-depth description of the power structures related to disciplinary disproportionality a variety of data were collected from one middle school to offer a narrative of disproportionality at that particular school. While insights might be gleaned that can serve to advise future efforts to remedy disciplinary disproportionality and will be described in the concluding chapter, the data in the next two chapters are intended to describe disciplinary disproportionality for Olam Middle School.

With the recognition that I have referenced the influence of social construction in the previous chapters, I acknowledge that the following data analyses are a construction of sorts. I recognize the lenses through which I organized and interpreted the data will undoubtedly be influenced by my own perceptions. It is with great humility that I assert that my analysis is not a construction of the truth about disciplinary disproportionality; but rather one interpretation of disciplinary disproportionality, when viewed through the Four Domains of Power. It is also of importance to note that each of the domains, while representing a seemingly separate topic, does not operate in isolation. Each of the

domains, as well as the content presented within them, touches upon and makes reference to content and data within other domains.

First, I will begin by presenting the findings for the Disciplinary and Structural Domain. Next, I will present the data that substantiates those findings. I will conclude each Domain Analysis with a summary of the findings with regards to the original research questions.

Disciplinary Domain

During the 2011-2012 school year, Olam Middle School reported 833 behavioral incidents, a decrease from 1,228 incidents during the previous school year. Despite the reduction in overall referrals, evidence of disproportionality remained consistent in the data across both school years. While Black/African American students were 21% of the total population of the school, they account for 36% of all disciplinary referrals for the 2011-2012 school year. In contrast, White/Caucasian students represent 63% of the total school population, but account for 48% of all disciplinary referrals.

Characteristics and disciplinary patterns for Olam Middle School students are shown in Table D1. Of the 127 Black/African American students, 56% had been referred to the office for disciplinary reasons one or more times ($N = 71$). This percentage (56%) reflects the Risk Index (Table D1) for Black/African American students for receiving an office discipline referral. This finding also demonstrates that more than one out of every two Black/African American students at Olam Middle School has been involved in a disciplinary incident one or more times. This finding is in contrast to the 29% of the White/Caucasian student population who have received an office disciplinary referral.

The Risk Ratio (Table D1) for Black/African American students is 1.83, indicating that they are nearly two times more likely to receive a disciplinary referral than students of other races. This rate is similar to those found in many other studies (Brooks et al., 2000; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Hinojosa, 2008; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011).

Types of Behavior

To evaluate differences in the types of behavioral violations demonstrated by Black/African American students and White/Caucasian students, behaviors categorized into Violent/Criminal, Nonviolent, and Other were evaluated for frequency by race (see Table D2). The difference in frequency of disciplinary code violations by category was not statistically significant between the two groups ($\chi^2(2) = 2.33, p > .05$). Less than 15% of the citations for both groups were classified as "Violent/Criminal," less than 30% were "Nonviolent," and 60% were "Other." Thus, the categories of behaviors demonstrated by both Black/African American students and White/Caucasian students are not significantly different.

A more in-depth analysis of specific behavioral offenses was conducted to determine the behaviors that are most prevalent in the disciplinary data for Black/African American students. The differences in specific behavioral violations are significantly different between Black/African American and White/Caucasian students ($\chi^2(2) = 88.94, p < .00$). Specifically, the four primary behaviors that emerge as most different were "Other school defined Offense," "Disruptive," "Bus Misbehavior," and "Disrespect" (see Table D3). These four behaviors account for 49% of all referrals received by

Black/African American students at Olam. Further examination revealed of the 137 incidents represented in “Other school defined offense” tended to reflect failure to adhere to other disciplinary practices, and included 32 incidents for students not having student planners, 33 for failure to serve after-school detention, and 21 incidents related to students having received their sixth infraction noted in their planner for minor behaviors. Similar to the findings presented by Rausch and Skiba (2004), the behavioral offenses most associated with disciplinary disproportionality tend to be those that are more subjective in nature, such as those described as “disruptive.” To further evaluate the nature of these four specific behaviors, the policy analysis within the Structural Domain will report the clarity and consistency of policies regarding all behaviors outlined in policy, but with an emphasis on these four in particular.

Disciplinary Responses

In-school and out-of-school suspensions for Black and White students are presented in Table D4. A Chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant rate of Out-of-school suspensions for Black/African American students ($\chi^2(1) = 5.85, p < .05$). Black/African American students received approximately 7% more Out-of-school suspensions (22%) than White/Caucasian students (15%); however, there was no statistically significant difference in the length of the suspension (number of days) ($t(125) = 0.40, p > .05$) between Black/African American ($M = 3.52, SD = 6.47$) and White/Caucasian ($M = 3.17, SD = 2.62$) students. There was also no significant difference in the rate of In-school Suspensions ($\chi^2(1) = .24, p > .05$) between Black/African American students and White/Caucasian students. Black/African American students

received 42% and White/Caucasian students received 58% of In-school suspensions. These findings suggest that while Black/African American students receive In-school Suspensions at a rate similar to White/Caucasian students, they are more frequently subjected to Out-of-school suspensions. When Out-of-school suspensions are issued, the length of the suspension tends to be similar for both races.

There were no documented incidents of expulsions that took place at Olam Middle School during the 2011-2012 school year. However, the frequency of long-term suspensions was calculated by determining the number of students suspended for Out-of-school suspension for a period of time greater than 10 days to a maximum of 365 days. The results of this calculation revealed that the count (see Table D4) of long-term suspensions was different at a statistically significant level ($\chi^2(1) = 6.19, p < .05$). Black or African American students (21%) received approximately 7% more long-term Out-of-school suspensions than White or Caucasian (14%) students.

Thus, the disciplinary data overall reveals that not only are Black/African American students at Olam Middle School two times more likely to be referred to the office, they are also significantly more likely to receive exclusionary disciplinary responses. Short and long-term Out-of-school suspensions are disproportionately resulting in greater numbers of Black/African American students being removed from the school setting as a result of disciplinary action.

The disciplinary data analysis also included an evaluation of the number of office discipline referrals issued by teacher. The average number of referrals submitted from the 44 staff members for the school year was 12 referrals per teacher. Twenty teachers had

referral rates higher than the average. Four teachers had a particularly high rate of referrals for Black/African American students, which resulted in each of the teachers contributing 7% each to the overall rate of referrals for Black/African American students. Taken together, these four teachers, who did not have the highest numbers of referrals overall, contributed to 28% of all referrals received by Black/African American students. This is a particularly interesting finding, as researchers (Skiba et al., 2002) have reported that disproportionality appears to stem from disproportionate referrals from the classroom, rather than outcomes impacted by the school administrator. Evaluating the total number of referrals issued by teachers could be misleading, as two of the four teachers were not in the top four teachers with the highest number of referrals overall; however, numbers of referrals issued by race reveals that a large percent of referrals received by Black/African American students can be traced back to four teachers.

It is of consequence to note that a large number of referrals in the data analysis were not connected to any particular teacher, instead a large percentage (19%) were documented under the name of the administrator processing the referral ($n = 162$). It is possible that this could indicate a large number of incidents occurring outside of the classroom in other school locations or it could be an oversight in the data collection process about the referral source. Interestingly, this particular data revealed a startling number of referrals for Black/African American students being processed by one school administrator. The school administrator who identifies as Black/African American processed all ($n = 136$) but 26 of the total number of office referrals that were documented under administrator names. The number of referrals associated with this

particular administrator accounts for 26% of all office referrals received by Black/African American students. Again, this could be the result of data documentation challenges with failure to attribute referrals to the actual referring source, or it could be an indication of a pattern of processing discipline referrals for Black/African American students by sending the student to the Black/African American administrator for discipline.

The finding that nearly half of all referrals for Black/African American students could be attributed to an isolated group of individuals might tempt one to conclude that the issue of disciplinary disproportionality in the school is the result of the behaviors and actions of a small group of individuals. However, the interview respondents suggested that the findings from these data are inadequate for drawing that conclusion because there are significant questions about the quality of documentation. Multiple respondents indicated that the data are under-reported and many incidents are not documented or officially responded to by administrators. According to their accounts, far more incidents are referred to the office than what are actually documented, particularly for Black/African American students. While not directly trying to imply the problem of disproportionality is much more widely dispersed, their responses instead tended to imply that data were not being accurately documented by the office staff. Yet, these statements alluded to the notion that the data do not adequately capture all referral events. One interviewee reported,

What you see on paper is disproportionate. It's nowhere near representative of what's actually in the schools. It's much—the behavior is much, much, much more disproportionate than what you see on paper. Because most of that stuff doesn't ever have anything done about it (chuckles). (548 F)

This particular interviewee suggested that the data inaccuracies distort the real rate of disproportionality because the school is aware of the issue and is attempting to modify the data to appear less disproportionate, in part by responding more harshly to White/Caucasian students. To offer further explanation the interviewee asserted,

Well, I think that you'd actually be surprised. If I were to write up a white student for, um, a violent behavior that didn't have a label, they would be suspended quite harshly. And if I were to write up a black student with special needs that had a long history of violent behavior, the chances of them having much of a consequence are almost nil. Because the school system is under pressure to get rid of disproportionality and particularly suspensions. So one way to do that is to make sure you're suspending your white students more. (210 F)

Another individual similarly expressed this concern,

Um, I—true or not, I'm not sure, but I think there's at least a perception that, uh, because some of those relationships that I talked about earlier, that there are certain groups of African American students who, um, are given multiple opportunities. And even though there are a lot of referrals and a lot of discipline that's carried through, I think the perception is that there's also a lot that isn't. (599 X)

When asked if this type of response was occurring prior to the initiation of this particular research, the answer suggested the topic of disproportionality was brought up “several years ago” and since that time, the school has been responding with harsher consequences for White students and under-reporting incidents for Black/African American students.

Both of these statements have interesting implications for the disciplinary data analysis. The perception that the data is not accurate or under-reported is a particular concern for this research project. I continued to probe interviewees to get a sense of this particular possibility. The primary challenge for this issue is that no data is produced for

incidents that are intentionally not being documented. The only evidence of these events would be specific accounts that teachers know were referred to the office, but were missing from the data analysis. Since the data analysis was about the overall school data, no data revealing specific incidents or specific students were summarized. In the end, there was no way to determine the accuracy of these claims because no other evidence suggested incompleteness of the data summary. The interviewee assertions also allude to the perception that it is White/Caucasian students, rather than Black/African American students who receive harsher consequences. This claim can be ruled out by the previously mentioned disciplinary data analysis which revealed that Black/African American students are significantly more likely to experience exclusionary disciplinary practices (long and short-term Out-of-school suspensions), regardless of whether other behavioral incidents for Black/African American students are being under-reported. The only way this assertion could be valid, would be if there were a far greater number of disciplinary incidents not being documented for White/Caucasian students than Black/African American students and this claim would undermine the assertion that these reporting omissions were specifically to increase the number of incidents attributed to White/Caucasian students. However, similar claims about the disciplinary impact for White/Caucasian students emerged through the theme “inconsistency” which will be discussed in the following section. The purpose of including these assertions here is to offer them as an example of staff perceptions about the data analysis, and to acknowledge the possibility of these claims.

Disciplinary Domain Themes

So far, we have explored the disciplinary data for Olam Middle School. The Disciplinary Domain was designed to not only capture these data, but also staff perceptions about disciplinary practices, student behavior, and teacher-related factors. The themes that emerged regarding the Disciplinary Domain are described in the following sections.

We're not sure there is a problem. Staff members were reluctant to acknowledge the occurrence of disciplinary disproportionality at Olam Middle School, despite having been presented data that documents on-going evidence of it. Data were presented to all staff members at Olam from the previous school year and the current school year (through February) during a staff meeting in February to ensure that all staff members were aware of the evidence of disciplinary disproportionality. The data revealed disciplinary disproportionality through a higher percentage of referrals administered to Black/African American students than would be expected given their percentage in the total school population, despite an overall decreasing trend in the total number of office referrals for the current school year. In other words, staff was shown data in numerical and graphic form revealing disproportionality in disciplinary practices for their school. In less than one month after this presentation, respondents to the Staff Survey appeared to either disagree with the data that was presented or express denial about the prevalence of disproportionality at their school all together. The survey responses indicated 48% of respondents "Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed" to the statement that Olam Middle disciplines Black/African American students more frequently than students of other

racism. Another 36% “Somewhat agree and disagree” with the same statement, leaving only 16% that “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed.” In addition, responses indicate that 36% “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” and 48% “Somewhat agree and disagree” with the statement that disciplinary disproportionality is a significant concern for the school. Only 16% again “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” that disproportionality was a concern. These were particularly perplexing findings, given the staff had been presented the data showing that Olam does appear to have evidence of disciplinary disproportionality which is the result of disciplining Black/African American students more frequently than would be expected given their proportion in the population.

The perception that White/Caucasian students receive harsher punishments explained in the previous section could be considered a possible reason for this type of response, as staff members seem to perceive disciplinary outcomes for Black/African American students to be significantly less frequent than the data indicate. This type of overwhelming response could also be reflective of the color blind racism frame “minimization” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This frame would imply that staff members were minimizing the evidence or existence of disproportionality, in a manner similar to the minimization of the existence of racism as a factor that affects the lives of Black/African Americans reported by Bonilla-Silva (2006).

An alternative explanation directed toward the behavior of Black/African American students also emerged. The perception that Black/African American students account for higher rates of referral because they are the one’s demonstrating problem behaviors more frequently, not because the staff is referring them at a higher rate, was

offered as the reason staff did not recognize disciplinary disproportionality. It should be noted that interviewee responses differed from the overall staff survey respondents, as only one interviewee openly expressed the belief that Olam does not have disproportionality in disciplinary responses. This particular staff member answered the question “do you believe that disciplinary disproportionality is an issue at this school?” by stating, “ Mmm, no. I think everybody’s treated fairly” (51 H). The interviewee further clarified this assertion saying, “Yeah, but you know, that, that isn’t—they’re not, they’re not frequently disciplined because they’re black. They’re frequently disciplined because of their behavior” (301 H). The interviewee defensively rebutted the disciplinary disproportionality data by making the claim that referrals are not written on the basis of race and asserted,

So, so—yeah. If they’re getting written up more—I mean, they’re not gonna write a black kid up just because he’s black. I mean, if he’s disruptive—and I know our staff is, is really forgiving, I mean they give these kids several chances. And if the kids blow it, it doesn’t matter if they’re black or white. (344 H)

Similar to the color-blind racism frame “naturalization” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), respondents seemed to express the notion that this was a natural outcome resulting only for the behavioral choices made by students. An individual expressed this saying, “I just think it’s the choices they make” (105 H). Another individual contended that staff seemed to view the outcome of discipline as a natural response to student behavior, as though disciplinary responses are immutable and not subject to environmental influence and interpretation. These assertions were made through statements such as, “I think that they think that the black kids get the consequences because they misbehaved, and it’s just the

way it is” (525 Q). While Bonilla-Silva (2006) described “naturalization” to represent ideology that was perceived to be “biological” or “innate,” the interviewees seemed instead to be referring to a natural state of cause and effect. Their descriptions suggested that disciplinary outcomes were simply the natural result of the behaviors that students chose to engage in.

Staff members appeared to perceive the concept of disciplinary disproportionality as the result of purposefully targeting Black/African American students for discipline because of their race and for no other reason, instead of understanding the term as simply reflecting the evidence of disproportionate impact of disciplinary procedures on Black/African American students. To my knowledge, nothing was introduced to staff to connect the evidence of disproportionality in the discipline data to purposeful racial targeting of students, which is quite possibly how they have conceptualized the term. Another individual expressed this conceptualization saying,

Well, I don't think—I mean, I hope, I really do hope that—and I feel that this [referring to the survey response to the questions about the existence of disciplinary disproportionality] does kinda prove that, in a sense—I don't think people are looking and going, that black kid is doing this, and I—you know what I mean? Or that white kid is doing this, or that Hispanic kid is doing that. I don't think we see it like that. I think we see it as that kid is being loud, or that kid is pushing somebody, or that kid is doing that. I don't think we really do that. (883 Z)

There were a variety of other ways that staff participating in the interviews expressed statements of denial and “minimization” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). The most frequent expressions of denial were captured within the theme of “Feigned or exempted goodness.” These expressions would generally reflect a personal denial of wrongdoing by

softening the language used to talk about disproportionality. This would include using exempting phrases such as, “not to be stereotypical” (268 X), “you hate to say it, but . . .” (931 Z), and phrases such as “I feel like I’m more self aware” (855 D), “I consider myself non-racist, probably one of the most non-racist persons ever” (33 Z) and “I don’t do . . . a lot of referrals” (419 Z). These phrases seem to reflect the struggle staff experience when being confronted with disciplinary disproportionality and it seems to capture some of the personal exemptions that individuals express about their own role in the event, by placing themselves outside of the problem.

In addition, certain phrases were used to introduce other races into the dialogue to deny intentionality in differential treatment. There were frequent interjections of phrases such as “there are plenty of white kids” (617 H) who also demonstrate those behaviors, who receive the same consequence, or who are affected by disciplinary responses in the same way. These statements served to undermine the focus on Black/African American students by making assertions that White/Caucasian students have the same, and in some instances harsher, disciplinary experience. An example of this kind of statement offered as an explanation in response to a question about differences in behavior between Black/African American and White/Caucasian students was, “But it’s just like the ones that aren’t getting in trouble. I mean, there’s plenty of black and white students that aren’t getting in trouble, that do just fine. There’s plenty of black and white kids that get in trouble. You know” (114 H). The degree to which the staff acknowledges the existence of disciplinary disproportionality has significant implications for creating dialogue and for supporting further examination. The efforts to reduce the significance of

disproportionality and the impact on Black/African American students in particular appears to be another reflection of the “minimization” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and is a significant factor to recognize within the Disciplinary Domain, as all other conversations about disproportionality are dependent upon its acknowledged existence.

Even if there is a problem, there is no need to address it. When asked if it is important for the school to develop a comprehensive plan to address disciplinary disproportionality, 40% of staff responded “Somewhat agree and disagree” another 24% “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” This suggests that more than half of the respondents were unsure or not committed and another quarter were opposed to the idea of creating a plan for addressing disciplinary disproportionality. This is not a particularly shocking finding, given the vast majority of staff did not perceive disciplinary disproportionality to be a concern for the school. However, this finding does offer a glimpse into a form of acceptance demonstrated within the disciplinary domain. Although there is no way to verify all of the possible reasons that staff do not see the need to address disproportionality, their overwhelming reluctance to address the issue suggests a certain degree of acceptance of existing disciplinary practices and subsequent disciplinary outcomes, regardless of the impact they might be having on certain groups of students.

Bonilla-Silva (2006) presented the frame of “abstract liberalism” which places “emphasis on equality in theory,” while rejecting any efforts to secure equity that could give the appearance of “preferential treatment” (p. 28). This frame was similar to staff responses when asked if it is fair to implement different disciplinary actions for

Black/African American students in order to prevent disciplinary disproportionality. The vast majority of staff, 84%, responded with “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.”

It was only through the interview process, as I was trying to clarify this finding that I recognized the limitations of the question I posed on the survey. What I wanted to know, but failed to ask on the survey was, “Is it fair to consider racial, cultural, and other factors specifically when dealing with disciplinary actions for Black/African American students?” Through the interview process, when posed this way staff consistently indicated that it would be fair to consider all relevant factors, but the majority offered the caveat that under no circumstances should Black/African American students be treated differently because they are Black even if it would prevent them from being subjected to disciplinary actions at a disproportionate rate. Staff members continued to express reluctance to consider discipline differently for different racial groups, but were more open to considering general relevant information, such as events taking place in the student’s life. This was an interesting conceptualization, in light of the data that suggests that Black/African American students are already being treated different with regards to disciplinary responses. The perception also seemed to reflect the sense that differential treatment for Black/African American students would not be fair to others who would continue to be punished for the same behavior. One individual asserted, “We want it to be fair. And, so, if you start saying well, we’re gonna not give this person a consequence or we’re not gonna do this because this person is black, does that mean they get by with that same behavior all the time?” (1122 Z). With further probing, staff continuously returned to the perspective that there should be one set of rules for everyone to follow.

Well, I think that as a—and I, and I’m probably one of those who said I strongly disagree. I think we need one set of rules, and one set of rules only, because that’s what society is, and that’s what we’re trying to get them ready for. Does it always work out that way in the court system, or in the traffic court, or wherever the case may be, but, I mean, if you’re speeding, you’re speeding. (1089 Z)

While staff members were posed the question about considering discipline differently on the basis of race, there was a tendency to transition away from race as the basis for consideration toward general relevant information. Another staff member explained the need to consider relevant information but maintain consistency in consequences stating,

I mean, you’re not gonna know everything about them, but taking the things that you do know about them to guide the tools that you use to help them academically and emotionally and socially, etc. Um, so, yeah, I, I think that it should guide the process to get to the consequence, or the remediation, or whatever the outcome is. Um, but I don’t think that they should be consequenced differently. I mean, I don’t think that, you know, just because you come from whatever background or situation, or, you know, family, whatever, that doesn’t excuse the behavior, whatever that behavior is. (415 X)

Taken together, the findings provide a strong account how the staff members interpret the meaning of the disciplinary data and the concept of disciplinary disproportionality. In addition, these findings offer a closer glimpse into several frames of color-blind racism, through which you can observe staff members grappling with the reasons offered for not responding to the issue of disciplinary disproportionality.

We are unaware. One of the most frequently cited responses to why the staff does not perceive disciplinary disproportionality to be an issue at Olam was a lack of staff awareness. Staff contended that there was a significant lack of awareness crossing a variety of topics. Lack of awareness was cited as a factor influencing teacher

interpretations of behavior, cultural differences, classroom management, student-teacher relationships, and understanding of the disciplinary data for the school overall. One individual contended that the staff had not been presented the data demonstrating disciplinary disproportionality (311 H). Several other staff members made statements such as, “We don’t know!” (731 Z) and “we’re so out of the loop” (727 Z). Another staff member stated “Um, and, you know, I’m not sure about their awareness of the overall disciplinary picture, you know, of how many [referrals are received by Black/African American students], you know” (1380 D).

When probed for more clarification in light of the fact that a staff was presented data about disciplinary disproportionality, interviewee responses tended to reflect the previously mentioned concerns about the quality of the data due to under-reporting behavioral violations for certain students or they expressed the notion that staff members are emotionally disconnected from the issue. The problems with the data were expressed through statements such as,

I think they’re—what the problem here is they’re thinking about—because a lot of—they’re really thinking about consequences for misbehavior. You know. At least half the time it’s just, oh, that’s a warning. But if a white student’s written up for the same thing, consequence every time. (521, 528 F)

The emotional disconnection to the issue of disciplinary disproportionality was expressed through statements such as, “Okay. Um (pause), yeah, I mean, maybe, you know, it, this isn’t occurring in my world, so, yeah. I’m not really concerned” (1189 D). Another staff member asserted this denial of disciplinary disproportionality was because, “They don’t

want to see it. They don't want to see it" (209 J). Yet another staff member expressed shock about this response from other staff members. This individual exclaimed,

But, you know, it's, I'm still thinking about they saw that data in the staff meeting and yet they still said there was not a problem. That just, that just blows my mind.

Wow, what else do you need? Yeah. So I guess what they're saying is yes this is out there, but I'm not really concerned about it. (818 Q)

Overall responses suggest that staff claim to be unaware of disciplinary disproportionality, however, when posed additional questions, they readily cited factors that appear to be contributing to a sense of denial, rather than a lack of awareness. Both, the expressions about the data not being sufficiently documented and the differential treatment experienced by White/Caucasian students as well as the emotional disconnection to the issue of disciplinary disproportionality could be exacerbating more frequent disciplinary referrals for Black/African American students either in response to the idea that they are being treated with more deference or simply because the teacher has no concern for the potential impact of increasing the number of referrals for Black/African American students.

Teacher tolerance. When interviewees discussed disciplinary responses the topic of consistency would inevitably arise. Most interestingly, the inconsistencies tended to be connected to teachers, and more specifically, teacher tolerance. This theme reflected the notion that every teacher has individual expectations and various levels of tolerance that determine how behavior is interpreted and disciplinary responses are activated within

their classroom. One staff member offered the following description of differences in teacher tolerance,

Not to say that it's a bad teacher or a good teacher, but, you know, we have many teachers that, you know, another teacher would walk into the room and say, Oh my gosh, how do you deal with that? You know? Those three would be down in the office already. But, you know, for that teacher it's not disruptive behavior, it's um, it's part of that academic environment. You know, and it still works for that teacher and the students, so, so I think, that's where I have the issue of, you know, when you start seeing more write-ups from certain teachers. (131 D)

Other descriptions related to teacher tolerance as a factor impacting discipline included statements about certain teachers having different a "frustration level" (1060 D) or the impact of "how that teacher's feeling that day" (444 H). Hinojosa (2008) reported that student perceptions of teacher expectations make a significant contribution to explaining student risk for disciplinary action. Staff members at Olam indicated that pre-judgments about students also appeared to be a factor that influences teacher tolerance with regards to discipline. "There are different expectations for different students based on their background, prior behaviors, family status, economic status, um, learning disability status, you name it. There's different expectations for different groups of students." (47 F) The result of these judgments was expressed by another staff member, "I think, I think they're, those kids that are getting written up a lot are treated differently in two ways. Maybe given a little bit more free pass by one group, and then another group being, you know, more picky with them" (260 D). Personal differences existing in the dynamic between teachers and students were also thought to contribute to the difference in

tolerance level expressed by teachers. A staff member articulated this factor with the assertion,

Cause I think teachers have personal issues with certain students where they are like I'm not dealing with anything this child says or does, so it's automatic write-up. I don't think in some classes it's consistent enough where the students have no idea of what's, what's expected. So, um, and like I said, I think there's teachers who—this is a very traditional staff, so they're used to kids who will sit still and be quiet and you call their parents, and parents will take care of it. But that's not how it is these days, so, um, I think that has a lot to do with some of these referrals as well. (121 J)

Many interviewees also referred to differences in tolerance by the grade-level of the teacher. Specifically, staff continuously reported that sixth-grade teachers had the “strictest” enforcement of rules for their students because their students were newest to the school and necessarily needed their behavior to be monitored and enforced more closely. Interviewees also recognized that the sixth grade had the fewest office referrals, which was substantiated by the disciplinary data analysis. Sixth grade accounted for 10% of all referrals for the school year, while seventh grade accounted for 48% and eighth grade accounted for 42%. It is interesting to consider staff perception of that strict adherence to rules was viewed as seemingly less tolerant. This finding seems somewhat counter-intuitive on the surface, stricter adherence to the rules and consistent enforcement at the classroom level would seem more likely to increase the number of student referrals. Instead, the actions taken by the sixth-grade teachers resulted in significantly lower numbers of disciplinary referrals overall. Thus, this finding and the interviewee perceptions appear to be suggesting that it is indeed variations in teacher tolerance leading to inconsistency in disciplinary responses that subsequently contribute to higher

numbers of disciplinary referrals across the grade levels, and disciplinary disproportionality by proxy.

Their behavior is different. Responses to the staff survey suggested that staff members perceive the behavior of Black/African American students to be contributing to the frequency of their referrals. Responses indicated high percentages of the staff “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” with the perspective that if Black/African American students are being disciplined more frequently it is because their behavior is more “severe” (40%), more “disruptive” (56%), more “disrespectful” (44%), and more “aggressive” (36%). However, a much smaller percentage thought that more “violent” (16%) behavior was demonstrated by Black/African American students. Similarly, a much smaller percentage “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” with the perspective that if Black/African American students are being disciplined more frequently it is because they have more “psychological/emotional challenges” (16%) or “less well-developed social skills” (16%). In contrast, regarding the role of staff in surveilling the behavior of Black/African American students, the majority of staff responses “Disagreed” or “Strongly Disagreed” that the higher rate of referrals received by Black/African American students were related to “getting caught more” (40%) or “being watched more closely by staff” (56%).

Significantly different perceptions emerged on the survey in response to these particular questions about differences in the behavior of Black/African American students which could account for the frequency with which they receive disciplinary referrals. When viewed as an overall summary from the school staff the perspective reflected a

tendency to believe that the behavior of Black/African American students is more problematic and that these differences account for the higher rates of referral. When disaggregated by race, the survey responses for the Black/African American staff members were different at a statistically significant level from the responses of White/Caucasian staff members. A note of caution must be offered with regards to the interpretation of this finding due to the extremely small sample of Black/African American staff member group ($n = 2$) in comparison to the much larger sample of White/Caucasian staff members ($n = 23$). However, these sample sizes (8% Black/African American and 92% White/Caucasian) do reflect a racial composition similar to that of the whole staff (11% and 89% respectively).

A statistically significant difference ($t(23) = -2.89, p < .05$) was indicated between Black/African American ($M = 2.00, SD = 1.41$) and White/Caucasian ($M = 3.52, SD = .67$) staff in response to the statement suggesting that if Black/African American students are disciplined more frequently it is because their behavior is often more “disruptive” (see Table D5). A statistically significant difference ($t(23) = -2.20, p < .05$) was also indicated between Black/African American ($M = 2.00, SD = 1.41$) and White/Caucasian ($M = 3.30, SD = .77$) staff in response to the statement that suggesting that if Black/African American students are disciplined more frequently it is because their behavior is often more “disrespectful.” Similar differences emerged in response to the statements suggesting if Black/African American students are disciplined more frequently it is because their behavior is often more “aggressive” ($t(23) = -2.12, p < .05$) and more “violent” ($t(22) = -3.44, p < .05$). The responses from Black/African American

staff members ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.41$; $M = 1.00$, $SD = 0.00$ respectively) tended to reflect disagreement or strong disagreement more than the responses from White/Caucasian staff members ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .74$; $M = 2.82$, $SD = .73$ respectively).

In general, responses to survey items consistently conveyed differences in perception of Black/African American student behavior, with Black/African American staff members expressing a stronger sense of disagreement across several behavioral descriptions. The voice of this small sample would have been lost in the trend of the total sample of survey responses; however, the perspective of Black/African American staff members is significantly different from White/Caucasian staff members with regards to their views about Black/African American student behaviors and offers a valuable insight into the intersection between race and behavioral interpretation. Despite the limitations associated with the small and unequal sample sizes, this type of finding is substantiated by other studies that have found the perspectives of Black and White respondents to vary significantly from one another on race-related issues (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005). Dee (2005) also reported findings suggesting that student behaviors are more likely to be identified as disruptive when the student does not share the same racial designation as the teacher, for both White/Caucasian students and minority students. Specific to this study, these findings suggest that race might serve as a mitigating factor impacting teacher interpretation of student behaviors.

To further explore behavioral differences impacting student discipline, interviewees were asked if the behavior of Black/African American students is different from that of White/Caucasian students. Consistently, every respondent suggested that

Black/African American students tend to be louder with statements such as, “Um, well (sighs). Volume level of students, uh, good proportion of black children are much more likely to speak at a higher volume” (90 F). Being louder has significant implications for getting caught more. One individual explained,

(sighs) It, it may draw attention to them more. And I always tell kids if you do something, usually second, you’re gonna be the one caught. So if I’m, if someone’s loud, being obnoxious, and I look in their direction, and then somebody else does something loud, or whatever the case may be, I’m already looking in that direction so I’m gonna catch you. (403 Z)

In addition to volume, tone also played a role in teachers’ perceptions of differences in behaviors for Black/African American students,

Absolutely. It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it. And, uh, you know—and, um, I think a lot of black students deal with conflict with teachers differently, especially when a black student has a conflict with a white teacher, the approach can be much more confrontational. They may not have been taught the yes ma’am, no ma’am approach to dealing with conflict, and for teachers, uh . . . they can feel like this is very disrespectful, and that they’re being attacked, and their authority is being questioned, and it’s about the worst sin you can commit. (95 F)

In light of these acknowledged differences in tone and volume exhibited by Black/African American students, the interviewees were asked if the difference in volume could account for the higher rate of referrals received by Black/African American students for “disruptive” behavior. Unanimously, all interviewees agreed that the observed difference in voice level could be contributing to disciplinary disproportionality through higher rates of referrals for this behavioral offense. One interviewee articulated the connection by saying, “[staff members] probably consider loud and disruptive the

same thing. And the intent of the child may not have been to just disrupt; maybe they're simply communicating in a way that they're most used to communicating in" (212 Q).

In addition to these perceived differences in behavior, several interviewees suggested that the manner and speed of response might also be a factor. Similar to the finding presented by Ferguson (2001), the expectation is not only for compliance with behavioral expectations, expediency of response is also a factor with regard to interpretation of student behavior. One interviewee explained, "The problem, I think, occurs when, um, they don't do that quick enough, or whatever, for some people. Or they say something back, like, what, we're not being loud . . . or whatever the case may be" (779 Z).

Overall, staff members at Olam tend to perceive the behaviors of Black/African American students as different. These perceived differences in terms of types of behaviors demonstrated, particularly those considered disruptive, could certainly be a factor contributing to disproportionality in disciplinary data. The explanations for these perceived differences in behavior will be explored more fully within the Cultural Domain in the following chapter.

The punishment is insufficient. As previously mentioned, several individuals expressed concerns about Black/African American student behavior being less likely to receive consequences than White/Caucasian students. Other staff members express overall questions about the consistency with which punishments were administered regardless of race. Several individuals expressed the notion that there was a general lack of willingness to "follow through on consequences" (38 F).

As an alternative explanation, one interviewee asserted that the issue is not the consistency of punishments, but rather, the expectation of harsh punishments exhibited by the staff. The individual explicated this argument saying,

And I think that comes from the culture of this school, which is very punishment-based. If a kid does something wrong, [teachers] want the kid to be punished; and they're not—uh, the mindset here is not necessarily changing the behavior counseling, it's like you broke a rule, you're going to be punished, and the more severe the rule, the number of days you should have, whether or not that changes the behavior or not. So I personally think that we have longer suspension times—for example, a one day suspension may have been just as well as a three day suspension. But that was already a culture. (42 Q)

Another interviewee validated the perspective that some staff members expect punishment, particularly exclusionary punishment that results in the student being removed from the school setting. The individual reported, “I’ve heard statements—in my day, we got rid of you know, the kids that didn’t want to learn, and then just [teach] the kids who want to learn—or, you know, why can’t [they be suspended] for the rest of the year” (699 J). To further validate these claims, certain interviewees openly expressed thoughts reflecting this “punishment” mindset. One individual expressed aversion to conferences as a consequence for behavior saying, “Um, because we have a lot of parent, um, speeches given at administrative conferences that I for one do not feel does any good (chuckles)” (94 Z). The same individual reported through a mocking tone of voice, a sense of insult resulting from students returning to the classroom setting without having been sufficiently “punished” by asserting, “Oh yeah! I mean, you hear them all the time, come into the class, oh, I had to go, you know, had to go up to the office, and, uh, I got written up, but they didn’t do anything. I got talked to” (348 Z). There appeared to be a

difference in views about the use and value of punishments administered in response to student behavioral violations. This difference in perception could certainly be a factor impacting disciplinary disproportionality through higher rates of referrals for students who have been perceived to have previously received insufficient consequences. This could also explain the frequent reports implying that administrators were “under-reporting” discipline data for certain students. It is possible that the responses of the administrators are viewed as insufficient within the culture of the school, which seemed to emphasize stronger forms of punishment in response to student misbehavior.

Disciplinary Domain Summary

The Disciplinary Domain has offered a way to examine the prevalence and types of behaviors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. It has also allowed for the description of a variety of factors that influence disciplinary responses including, the teachers initiating the referral, teacher tolerance levels, and beliefs about differences in behavior for Black/African American students. Disciplinary disproportionality is impacted by more than disciplinary incidents or what disciplinary data can reveal. This Domain offered a deeper exploration of staff perceptions about the existence of disproportionality, the validity of the disciplinary data, the efforts to deny disproportionality, and the perceived value of punishments that might be maintaining the existence of disciplinary disproportionality. From this perspective, lack of awareness, denial of disproportionality, teacher tolerance level, and quite possibly, the racial difference between White/Caucasian teachers and Black/African American students are beliefs and factors that could be contributing to disciplinary disproportionality.

Acceptance of racialized outcomes within the Disciplinary Domain appeared to take the form of denial, suggesting that staff members accept the existing practices and subsequent outcomes as they currently exist. In contrast, resistance might be exemplified by the real or perceived differences in behavior demonstrated by Black/African American students or in consequences that were possibly offered as alternatives to exclusionary practices. Overall, the Disciplinary Domain provides a valuable lens through which examinations of disciplinary disproportionality can uncover staff perceptions and beliefs that serve to protect existing disciplinary power structures and offer perspectives beyond what can be revealed simply by presenting quantitative data about disciplinary events and outcomes.

In the next section the Structural Domain will serve as the framework for examining disciplinary policies at Olam Middle School. This analysis will build upon the findings regarding the four specific behavioral violations most frequently associated with disproportionate outcomes in disciplinary data for Black/African American students.

Structural Domain

There are three different policies and one disciplinary documentation tool that are utilized by Olam Middle School. The Structural Domain analysis consisted of a categorical crosswalk of the school district “2011-2012 Student Code of Conduct,” the “Olam Middle School 2011-2012 Faculty/Staff Handbook,” the “Student Handbook,” “Student Planners,” and the database system used to collect information about disciplinary incidents in order to evaluate clarity and consistency across policy and documentation tools.

Structural Analyses

According to the disciplinary data analysis reported in the previous section, the behaviors most closely related to disproportionate outcomes were “Disruptive,” “Inappropriate language/disrespect,” “Bus misbehavior,” and “Other school defined offense.” While these behavioral offenses are associated with higher rates of disciplinary disproportionality, it is unclear how the various policies within the school and district impact the administration of discipline for these four behaviors. The policy crosswalk allows for a numerical value reflecting the level of clarity and consistency across each policy. This highest possible value for a specific behavior is 20. The policy analysis crosswalk (see Table D6) shows that “Bus misbehavior” had a mean score of 11. “Inappropriate language/disrespect” had a mean score of 8. “Other school defined offense” by its very nature is problematic, as it appears to serve as a description of student response to other disciplinary actions or chronic minor incidents and none of the policy documents clarifies the category of “other” or explains the types of behavioral offenses that would be categorized under this heading. Thus, the score for this behavior would be 0.

“Disruption” was also particularly problematic. It had a mean score of 3. Surprisingly, it is not listed in the District Code of Conduct at all. It is only briefly mentioned in the Staff handbook and is listed as a behavior in the student planner. This is a significant concern because there is no consistent definition or guidance in the policies about what disruptive behaviors are, or how they should be responded to.

Overall, for the four behaviors most frequently associated with disproportionate outcomes for students, “Other school defined offense” is not listed in any of the policies and “Disruption” is not listed in the district policy and only briefly referred to in the staff handbook and student planner. The other two behaviors, “Bus misbehavior” and “Inappropriate language/disrespect” do not seem to reflect a high level of consistency and clarity across the various policies. In addition to the challenges resulting from less clearly defined descriptions for these behaviors, each of these offenses are relatively subjective concepts, further magnified by the lack of examples or definitions that could be offered in policy. It is possible that the inconsistency surrounding these four behaviors could be contributing to the evidence of disproportionality observed in the disciplinary data analysis.

Categories of behavior in policy. When grouped into three distinct categories of “Violent/Criminal,” “Non-violent,” and “Other,” there are minimal differences in the mean scores for policy clarity and consistency. The mean score for “Non-violent” behaviors was 7. For “Violent/Criminal” behaviors the mean score was lower at 6. The mean score for “Other” behaviors was 6.5. The “Non-violent” behaviors with the highest mean scores, indicating more clarity across the policy documents included “Dress Code” with a score of 18 out of 20 possible points. Interestingly, “Dress Code” had the highest score overall for all behaviors listed in all of the policy documents. “Attendance” was also a “Non-violent” behavior with 16 out of 20 possible points. For the category of “Other” behaviors, “Bullying and Harassment” had the highest number of possible points with 16 of 20. For the “Violent/Criminal” Behaviors “Threats” had the highest score with

10 out of 20 possible points. This finding suggests that while the overall mean for “Violent/Criminal” acts is not significantly different from the other categories of behaviors, the behaviors included in the policies might be less clearly defined or consistently reflected across the multiple policy documents. This finding suggests that the more serious behaviors, which would be categorized in the “Violent/Criminal” category are not the behaviors that are more clearly defined within the policies. It is unclear from the documents why certain behaviors have been clearly defined and documented across policies, such as “Bullying and Harassment” or “Dress Code” and others have less clarity or have not been included at all. However, behaviors that are most clearly defined are found within the category of “Nonviolent.” Certainly, if behaviors that are more subjectively interpreted could be contributing to the overall pattern of disciplinary disproportionality within the school, then it is reasonable to suggest that the lack of clarification found in the policy for these behaviors may, in part, contribute to the disciplinary pattern as well.

Overall, the analysis across each of the behavioral categories suggests that much greater emphasis is placed on clearly defining the dress code, attendance, and bullying and harassment than the four behaviors most significantly related to disproportionality. While the dress code is discussed in detail for multiple pages across all three documents, “Disruptive” behavior is only briefly mentioned or not mentioned at all.

The policy with the most clarity was the District Policy with an average of 5.19 out of 6 possible points for the 26 behaviors included within. Most often, the District Policy lists the behavior and provides options for consequences. Often the lower scores

for certain behavioral descriptors on the District Policy were the result of definitions or examples that were not provided. This is a logical finding, given the District Policy is referred to as the primary disciplinary policy, and all others serve to further clarify the implementation of the District Policy at each particular school and are outlined according to the role of the individual governed by the policy (student or staff). Therefore, any inconsistency and lack of clarity in the District Policy is a significant concern. On this basis, the lack of clarity in this policy about the four behavioral violations most often demonstrated by Black/African American students could contribute to the increased risk of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for Black/African American students.

The results of the Structural Analyses have demonstrated the areas of policy which are more and less clearly defined. In addition, the specific lack of clarity regarding the most common behaviors associated with disciplinary disproportionality has also been discussed. In the next section, staff perceptions of the disciplinary policies will be examined to further explicate any factors that might have an impact on disciplinary disproportionality.

Disruptive omission. To further clarify the omission of “disruptive” from the District Code of Conduct, interviewees were asked how this behavior is addressed in policy. Interviewees frequently referred to the first rule in the District Code of Conduct, “Non-compliance,” which was referred to as “vague enough that you can use [it] for almost anything that happens in a school” (97 D). When asked more directly if “disruptive” is specifically listed or described in any of the policies, individuals were

either unaware of the omission or agreed, “yeah, disruptive behavior is not in here” (94 Q).

In response to the discussion about disruptive behavior and the lack of clarity within the policy, nearly all of the interviewees recommended the need to make changes in the policy. Several called for the inclusion of behavioral definitions and examples. One interviewee stated the need for more specific descriptions such as,

A standalone type, you know, destructive behavior, and then describe what destructive behavior really looks like, you know, real concrete examples. Um, and then some clearly defined, beca—and that, you know, that’s, another one of the really grey areas is, you know, disruptive behavior varies so much from teacher to teacher. (124 D)

Disruptive behavior was one topic that allowed each of the interviewees to concretely discuss the implications of policy. What emerged from these conversations was the recognition that existing policy is not clear, vague at best, and does not provide a sufficient definition or examples for the behaviors most often associated with disciplinary disproportionality. As a result, this ambiguity can undermine any sense of consistency when individual staff member interpretations have become the criteria for initiating a referral.

We are consistently inconsistent. Overwhelmingly, the theme of inconsistency emerged regarding the disciplinary policies and practices implemented throughout the school. According to survey responses, 56% of staff members “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” with the notion that classroom and school-wide rules are implemented consistently by all staff. Another 28% “Somewhat agreed and disagreed” with this

statement. On the topic of consistency, one interviewee expressed disbelief that any staff member thought that rules are implemented consistently. The response they offered was, “I, I’m shocked. I would—I can’t believe any teacher said that it would be implemented consistently! (laughs)” (594 F).

Only one interviewee reported that rules are implemented with consistency across staff members. The response offered by this individual suggested there might be some variation by location, but overall the rules are “consistent and fair” (21 H). When asked if teachers tend to interpret the rules and apply them all in the same manner, the individual’s response was simply, “Yeah” (45 H).

Classroom management, or the lack thereof, also emerged as a theme to explain differences in the rate of referral to the office. It was also cited most frequently on the survey as an appropriate strategy to consider for responding to disciplinary disproportionality. One interviewee explained how teachers implement disciplinary expectations within the school saying,

I think that there are maybe half of the teachers in the building that have clear expectations that are consistently carried out. Um, they tend to be, um—I guess it’s kind of a mix. I would say that some of our teachers that have been here for a very long time and sort of have this mentality of the Olam way, um, have very clear expectations, and, and follow through. I think there are also some newer teachers—you know, fresh out of school, clear expectations—um, and follow through. And then I think there are a lot of teachers in the middle who may have expectations, they may or may not be clear, even if they are clear, they’re not followed through consistently. (43 X)

The interviewees consistently agreed with the possibility that lack of classroom management could be a factor contributing the disciplinary disproportionality and the need for additional training as a strategy to possibly reduce disproportionality.

In contrast to the vast majority of staff-members suggesting classroom rules are not implemented consistently, the biggest majority of respondents to the survey seemed to have mixed feelings about the consistency with which the policies are followed. 44% of respondents “Somewhat agreed and somewhat disagreed” with the notion that the policies are followed consistently and 36% of staff members “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that the Code of Conduct and Student Discipline Handbook are followed consistently.

The responses from interviewees also seemed somewhat mixed regarding the consistency and clarity of the disciplinary policies. Several individuals believed that the policies were clear but not implemented consistently (77 Z) or that “the expectations that are on paper are not the expectations in the culture of the school environment (20 F). Other individuals adamantly asserted that the policies are incongruent and have inconsistent language, as well as omissions. Such responses indicated the need for consistency with the following sentiment,

Um, to make those match. And to make what’s in the student handbook match what’s given to the district, to make that match school board policy, and then to make that align with what our school resource officer is doing as well, cause they are not all speaking the same language. (107 Q)

Here again, with regards to the implementation of the policy there appears to be a perception of inconsistency in follow through as well. When asked if the disciplinary

responses (In-school and Out-of-school Suspensions) are administered fairly and consistently for all students, the majority of survey respondents, 44%, “Somewhat Agreed and Somewhat Disagreed” with the statement, while 32% expressed disagreement and only 24% expressed agreement. Certain individuals expressed the belief that the District Code of Conduct is “kinda the bible that they stick to” (44 D) while others implied variability suggesting, “Um, I think maybe some of the administrators, um, just tend to be more—this is the letter of the law, and abide by the letter of the law; whereas others, um, look for more opportunities to give kids wiggle room” (27 X).

Overall, staff perception seems to reflect the notion that there is varying degrees of inconsistency in the implementation and follow-through on policy implementation from the classroom level to the administration of consequences. These inconsistencies in the implementation of the policies combined with any lack of clarity existing within them, could in combination be significantly contributing to discrepant behavioral outcomes for students.

How does the continuum work? The staff expressed questions about the continuum of consequences offered within the existing policy, which could be contributing to lack of consistency. With the District Code of Conduct in particular, the concept of “first offense” was not clearly defined. One interviewee questioned this lack of clarity and the impact that it might have on teacher perceptions of how disciplinary incidents are handled as a result of the policy stating,

Right, and even within, like, how this handbook is written, like the consequences that can be given? It's so broad, and it doesn't really say anything about the first offense, or the second offense, or the third offense. Um, and some teachers say well that kid's a troublemaker, he's already been in trouble for, I don't know, let's say he stole a pencil or something—but then he turns around and uses profanity. Well, to me, that's two first offenses, whereas [others] view it more as this is a kid, and by the fifth time he does something he needs to be out the door. (151 Q)

Another interviewee expressed frustration about this lack of clarity in the continuum of consequences provided in the District Policy because it seems to create a greater length of delay in responding to behavioral offenses. In addition, this perception also appears to validate the previously described staff member emphasis on punishments. The concern was expressed,

I can kinda see where maybe the administrators are coming from sometime; but I also feel that, um, and I guess my upbringing was you did something, you were punished for it then, there, on the spot, and you pretty much never did it again. Or you knew there was an immediate and swift circumstance. I think we sometimes, here as a school, it's sort of, I don't know, the, the continuum and time frame takes too long. (100 Z)

Another interesting finding was related to staff perceptions of zero tolerance policies, which would reflect the furthest extreme on the continuum of consequences. According to survey responses, 32% “Disagree” or “Strongly disagree” with the idea that zero tolerance policies might be a factor contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. Another 44% could neither agree nor disagree with the statement, suggesting a mixed perception about this topic. Upon examination of the District Code of Conduct, no particular behavioral consequences appeared to be reflective of a zero tolerance policy, in which only one mandatory, typically harsh consequence was offered. Therefore, based

upon my own examination of the policies it does not appear that zero tolerance policies were a factor contributing to disciplinary disproportionality.

In sum, it does not appear that zero tolerance policies are utilized by the school or district, as none were identified within the policy. Yet, staff members appear to be unsure of the impact of such policies. The continuum of consequences outlined in the policies necessarily requires a meaningful way to determine what factors contribute to movement along that continuum, such as the number of previous offenses. Lack of clarity within the policy on this issue might be contributing to negative perceptions from staff about disciplinary responses. In addition, these data suggest the lack of clarity could be contributing to differential treatment for Black/African American students, not through zero tolerance policies, but through an undefined continuum along which they might progress to more significant consequences at a faster pace or more frequently than White/Caucasian students.

Structural Domain Summary

The Structural Domain has allowed for an examination of the less visible systemic factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. This domain has created a way to engage in the in-depth examination of various disciplinary policies and quantify that consistency and clarity within each. Specifically related to the four behaviors most often associated with disciplinary disproportionality, the behaviors were not clearly presented, minimally included, or omitted altogether. Thus, the Structural Domain offered a way to identify the existing gaps in disciplinary policy. Additionally, staff perceptions within this domain suggested inconsistency in policy implementation, response, and classroom

management were significant issues related to disciplinary events. There also appeared to be confusion about how students progress through the continuum of consequences which could have significant implications for disciplinary outcomes. If, Black/African American student behavior is most significantly different from that of White/Caucasian students for the four behaviors previously described, then the statistically significant finding that Black/African American students are more likely to receive exclusionary disciplinary outcomes, might be connected in some way to this continuum of consequences based on prior numbers of offenses making it more likely they receive an exclusionary disciplinary response. While the discrepancies associated with the Structural Domain were not directly linked to race in survey or interview responses, the respondents seemed to be pointing at the lack of clarity and consistency as a factor that could be contributing to disproportionate outcomes. I contend that it is in this subjective discordant space where individual interpretation is introduced into disciplinary decisions, that race could certainly be the covert and unnamed force that fills in the gaps existing within the policy. Acceptance of disproportionate outcomes seemed to be reflected by the overwhelming mixed responses about the policies. It seems shocking to think that the vast majority of respondents tend to not perceive consistency in the policy or are not certain; but even more startling is that there is not more concern, frustration, questioning taking place in response to this general consensus from the staff. Resistance might be best observed within this domain, through staff efforts to ask for greater clarity and more examples within the policies. In total, the Structural Domain had provided an invaluable way to examine power within the inconsistent and unclear pages of disciplinary policies,

and how formal structures can contribute to on-going evidence of disproportionate outcomes for students through such discontinuity.

Chapter Summary

The Disciplinary and Structural Domains have offered valuable insights into a variety of factors that might be contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. This chapter has presented disciplinary practices, policies, and staff beliefs potentially relevant to the issue of disciplinary disproportionality.

This chapter utilized the discipline data at Olam Middle school to describe the characteristics and features of disciplinary disproportionality. These results showed that the types of behaviors demonstrated by Black/African American students were not significantly different from White/Caucasian students; however, Black/African American students were most often disciplined for four specific behaviors that were subjective and less well-defined. While the behavior of Black/African American students was not significantly different, they were significantly more likely to receive exclusionary disciplinary outcomes, such as suspensions.

Despite evidence of disciplinary differences for Black/African American students, staff members tended to minimize disciplinary disproportionality by denying that it actually exists. Inconsistencies, real or perceived, about the quality and accuracy of the disciplinary data had a significant impact on staff perceptions about disciplinary disproportionality and became a common strategy to minimize the need to acknowledge or respond to disciplinary disproportionality. Staff members often interpreted disciplinary disproportionality as the result of purposeful targeting of students on the basis of race,

and as a result they seemed to struggle with talking about its existence and their perceived role in school systems that maintain it. Staff members frequently interjected other races into the discussion to deny this purposeful targeting and intentional difference in treatment. There was also a tendency to believe that disciplinary outcomes were a natural consequence occurring in response to the behaviors students chose to engage in. Olam staff members also reported a general school culture that seemed to place greater emphasis on punishment in response to student behavior and as such, adamantly prefer to maintain consequence systems that do not consider alternative outcomes on the basis of race, as they were believed to be less fair.

Lack of awareness, inconsistency, and lack of clarity appeared to be factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality within both the Disciplinary and Structural Domains. A general lack of awareness about disciplinary issues and outcomes was reported to be a significant factor related to disciplinary disproportionality; however, this theme appeared to be used as a strategy to deny, emotionally disconnect from, and otherwise avoid a direct confrontation with the evidence of disciplinary disproportionality. Differences in teacher tolerance, expectations and classroom management were also thought to be significant factors contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. Stricter adherence to school and classroom rules appeared to result in fewer overall referrals, as demonstrated by one grade level within the school. Lack of clarity within the disciplinary policies, particularly for “Disruptive” and “Other School Defined Offences,” results in responses that largely rely on individual interpretation,

which was directly linked to a significant proportion of the disciplinary referrals received by Black/African American students.

Staff members perceived the behavior of Black/African American students to be a significant factor contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. Staff members believed Black/African American student behavior to be more severe, disruptive, disrespectful, and aggressive. They also tended to believe that Black/African American students tend to be louder and speak with a different tone, which was thought to contribute to higher rates of referral for disruptive behavior. Despite these perceptions expressed by the staff overall, Black/African American staff members were significantly more likely to disagree with the notion that the behavior of Black/African American students is more disruptive, disrespectful, aggressive, or violent. Thus, these findings suggest that race might be factor influencing the interpretation of Black/African American student behavior.

The greatest value in examining data through these domains results from more than merely examining disciplinary data; the staff perceptions of the data and acknowledgment of the existence of disproportionality, as well as, their interpretation of inconsistencies in policy implementation have significant implications for understanding factors that might be contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. In this way, disciplinary disproportionality appears to be maintained by power structures established upon deeply entrenched beliefs about the behavior of Black/African American students, which do appear to be influenced by race, and inconsistent policies and practices that allow those individual beliefs and interpretations to shape the ways staff members interpret and respond to student behavior.

In the next chapter the Cultural Domain will uncover staff perceptions of cultural factors related to disciplinary disproportionality. The Interpersonal Domain will also be explored in order to share insights about existing relationships between Black/African American students and staff members. This chapter will also include an analysis the Four Domains of Power subscales which were created from items on the Staff Survey. This data will describe the relationship between and across the domains, which will offer insight into the value of examining disciplinary disproportionality through the lens of color-blind racism and the Four Domains of Power.

CHAPTER V

CULTURAL AND INTERPERSONAL DOMAINS

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. (Albert Einstein, as cited in Kelly, 2004, p. 80)

Staff perceptions of disciplinary disproportionality, student behavior, and policy, as discussed in the previous chapter, are critical for assessing any prospect of addressing disciplinary disproportionality. But there are also several factors that are much more insidious and inflammatory that must be assessed in order to fully explain the factors contributing to disproportionality. The Cultural Domain offers an examination of the beliefs expressed by staff members about the culture of Black/African American students and the role these beliefs might play in contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. This domain offers a glimpse into staff perceptions of Black/African American student families, values, and economic-status. While these perspectives imply cultural factors are contributing to disproportionality, it is vastly more critical to examine how the expression of these cultural beliefs by staff can impact the racial climate of the school and the day-to-day interactions between students and teachers, which will be examined within the Interpersonal Domain.

This chapter will begin by sharing the significant findings associated with the Cultural Domain, followed by the Interpersonal Domain. A summary for each domain will respond to the original research questions and outline the key findings for each. The

conclusion will offer an overall analysis of the process of utilizing the Four Domains of Power model for examining disciplinary disproportionality to document the strengths and challenges of using this model as an approach to investigative inquiry for disciplinary disproportionality.

Cultural Domain

The Cultural Domain betrays teachers' covert conversations about Black/African American students by shining a light on the beliefs that they profess are cultural, not racial. It also offers the most comprehensive evidence to substantiate the claim that color-blind racism is a factor impacting disproportionate disciplinary outcomes.

Cultural Analysis

The Cultural Domain was evaluated through responses to the Staff Survey and staff member interviews. The responses to both of these data collection methods offered a unique perspective about how teachers view students and their families. Responses also demonstrated the ways in which staff members avoid focusing on race, by transitioning to other factors such as culture or class. Each of the emerging themes related to these beliefs will be described, followed by a summary of the potential implications associated with each.

It's the student. Staff perceptions seemed to attribute disproportionate disciplinary outcomes by pointing to certain characteristics of the students, such as academic ability or motivation. Staff did not seem to believe that more frequent disciplinary issues for Black/African American students were the result of "psychological/emotional challenges" (56%). In stark contrast, the majority of

respondents “Agree” or “Strongly Agreed” that if disciplinary actions are impacting Black/African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to “academic struggles for the student” (60%).

The perception that academic skill is a factor contributing to disciplinary disproportionality is an interesting two-sided argument. Researchers have found that student behavior has an impact on teacher judgments and evaluations about student academic ability (Bennett et al., 1993). Thus, it is possible that many students with significant behavioral challenges do not have academic challenges, but teachers might perceive they do as a result of their higher rates of problem behavior. Other researchers have linked evidence of lower achievement to the frequency of removals from the school setting as a result of exclusionary disciplinary responses (Gregory et al., 2010). The challenge with academic issues contributing to disproportionality is determining if the academic problems preceded the behavioral problems or vice versa. Nonetheless, student achievement and behavior appear to be linked in a reciprocal relationship, with a seemingly indeterminable origin. One staff member asserted that “disproportionality in behaviors is just a mirror of the disproportionality you have in academic achievement” (740 F).

The “Cultural” frame of color-blind racism is conceptualized as “culturally-based arguments” that are a non-racial way of explaining the social standing of minority groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). From this perspective, staff members seem to be applying the concept of lower academic performance to Black/African American students writ large. One interviewee expressed this notion saying,

And another thing, too: look at the statistics of—if you were to take just a look at let's say white girls who are not from an educably—uh, disadvantaged background, so they've got—they're not living in poverty, they're not, um, they don't have a disability, you would have on the [end of] grade test—which they take here—I would guarantee 99% passing. But if you take a look at say a population of black males—I think we're around 68% passing. So if you have a group of students, a large group of students, where 3 out of 10 are well below grade level, they're frustrated in the classroom. And anytime you have a student that's frustrated in the classroom, you're going to have problems. So I think a lot of what you see in disproportionality is disproportionally students of color and minority students struggle in the classroom. They're way behind academically, and that is a major root cause of what ends up being a whole lot of problems. (105 F)

The point here is not that academic struggles for students do not matter or are not a contributing factor to disciplinary issues; but rather the beliefs held by staff about academic achievement of minority students also matters. These generalized statements about Black/African American student achievement are not overt expressions of biological inferiority. They are instead a professed cultural belief that minority students have lower achievement, which was being used by staff to explain disproportionality in discipline.

This type of cultural perception has significant implications for how students are treated by staff. Several interviewees suggested that teachers do not tend to feel hopeful about the prospects of students overcoming these academic challenges. One individual explained saying,

Well, I think right away, when students are so used to being judged based on how well they do in school. So they are already on the defensive if they're an academic failure when they show up on your doorstep. And if you're gonna, you know—and a lot of teachers are already looking at you, they go, well, you've got one last year, it's a waste of my time this year. Have a seat in the back, Johnny. You know. (409 F)

Another staff member made the connection between Black/African American student behavior and special education. When asked if academic struggles contribute to disciplinary disproportionality the interviewee asserted that students who struggle academically would be better served in a separate setting, such as special education. The individual said,

but I don't think that we do kids a service by, um, placing struggling children in classrooms with academically gifted kids. Um, for that matter, I don't know that we do them a service by placing them in regular ed classrooms. Um, teachers cannot meet the needs of thirty—you know, thirty different needs in one classroom. (256 X)

In addition to academic struggles demonstrated by students, staff members also perceive that student motivation is significant issue related to disproportionality. A large majority of respondents on the Staff Survey, 84%, “Agreed” or “Strongly agreed” that “lack of personal motivation to succeed is a significant predictor of behavioral challenges.” One interviewee reported the powerlessness that teachers feel about instilling a value of education in students by saying,

Yeah, and he, he has not gotten the message, and does not see how an education is going to move him forward in life, and I—and the children that have that, that understand that, the value of education, worlds can be done, but there's a lot of children that—they don't have that message, they don't have that value system, and if they don't value education . . . there's not much that can be done. (144 F)

The perceived lack of motivation appeared to be even more of an issue, when the student has significant academic struggles. The same individual explained,

Very few students equate hard work with success at this point. And it's very difficult to take a student who doesn't equate work with success, doesn't value education, and get them to move toward success. Because a student who's behind has to work very hard. And it's just very rare to have that happen at this point. (161 F)

Overall, academic struggles cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor to disciplinary disproportionality through the findings of this study. Yet, staff beliefs about Black/African American student achievement seem to reflect a broadly generalized cultural belief about low performance, which was demonstrated in conjunction with a sense of hopelessness about the ability to effectively raise achievement. In addition, these professed beliefs about lower academic performance were connected with a general sense of frustration about how to respond to diverse achievement levels within a regular education setting. The thread that connects staff perceptions about lower academic performance and higher disciplinary referrals for Black/African American students can also be directly linked to the families of students.

It's their family. Overwhelmingly, staff member responses indicated that family related factors are contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. The majority of respondents "Agree" or "Strongly Agreed" that if disciplinary actions are impacting Black/African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to "family issues in the student's home" (60%), "lack of family support" (72%), and "lack of parent/family involvement" (76%). Seventy-two percent of staff members also agreed with the statement, "Family values are a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at this school."

Evidence of these beliefs about negligent, unsupportive, and uninvolved parents were also consistently expressed during the interviews. One interviewee recalled comments shared with her from students saying, “Um, so if the parent’s not involved, or if the parent doesn’t seem to care, it’s, and some of the kids will say that to you. My mom don’t care if I do my work” (995 Z). Another interviewee expressed the notion that multiple factors taking place in the home of students can contribute to behavioral challenges at school with the assertion that “home life has to do with everything in the way you’re gonna act and the way you’re gonna behave” (415 H).

The more serious claims made about student families included the belief that Black/African American families’ do not value education. This appeared to also be a reflection of the “cultural” frame (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), through which staff members appeared to be explaining the reason for lower achievement and more frequent behavioral referrals as the result of Black/African American family values, which do not match school values. One staff member suggested that disproportionality appeared to be the result of this mismatch. The individual asserted, “I definitely, um, think that there’s a disconnect between, um, school culture and, um, gosh, I kind of hate to say this—and expectations from home” (183 X). A different interviewee more openly stated what the perceived conflict involved. This interviewee said,

That’s just not what it is. Um, and, it’s from—go to one of the awards assembly here and see how many parents of color are coming to see their kids. Go to a basketball game. Go to a football game. Um, you know, if your parents think that school’s not important, how are you ever gonna believe that school’s important? You know? If your parents think your involvement in athletics is more important than school, or that you’re, uh, outside of school commitments are more important

than school, you're a victim of that. If you're surrounded by people in your community that have that same value system, how are you going to escape? (303 F)

What is behind this veiled assertion about what Black/African American families' value is a perceived difference in values based on race. While individuals did not directly state that Black/African American families do not value education, they felt comfortable talking about the perceived cultural differences. Thus, the use of the "cultural" frame (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) allows these perceptions to be voiced without overtly speaking of race.

In contrast, several interviewees shared beliefs that explained why staff members perceive family values as a significant factor related to disciplinary disproportionality. Speaking about Black/African American families, one individual said,

I think that they value education; they may not value teachers or the authority structures of school because I think it's possible that some of them had negative experiences in school, and that just kinda carried with them. But I do think because they want what's best for their child, and they know that an education is needed to be successful, that they do want kids to do well in school. (314 Q)

When asked why staff responses on the survey reflected a high percentage of staff members agreeing with family issues having a significant impact on disciplinary disproportionality one interviewee exclaimed, "I think that's a cop out. I think that's something that they've come up—because, again, it takes responsibility off of them" (276 J).

According to one interviewee these beliefs could have significant impact on student-teacher relationships based on the expectations that result from teachers'

believing that a students' family does not value education. The individual passionately asserted,

Well, here's the thing—if you don't—if you think that, don't you think that comes across to that child as I don't believe that you'll be able to do this? I mean, that comes across whether you know it or not. You don't set the same expectations for them because you believe in your mind, cause you already know their family, which you don't, that you're not going to be able to succeed cause you come from a family that doesn't value education. And so when you put that in your mind, you've already defeated—you're already defeated, and you've allowed—that child is going to see that regardless of if you ever articulate that, but in your actions they will see that. That this teacher doesn't care enough about me to make sure I get this content. That they'll sit down with Sally, and Sally, good job, you did your homework. But she doesn't care enough about me to make sure I get this content because, you know, whatever reason. (293 J)

Hinojosa (2008) reported that home characteristics, such as having two parents and access to resources, do contribute to an overall reduced risk of suspension for Black/African American students; however, home factors do not fully explain or account for the difference in suspension rates received by Black/African American students. This is important to note, as the presentation of these issues involving families does not imply that families have no role in disciplinary outcomes for students, but rather, to highlight the potential impact associated with teachers' perceptions of Black/African American family values and the role those beliefs might play in student discipline.

Culture and race are confusing, but it's definitely not about race. There were mixed responses about whether disciplinary actions are impacting Black/African American students more frequently, possibly due to “misinterpreting cultural differences.” Twenty-eight percent “Disagreed” or “Strongly Disagreed” and 32% “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” with this statement. The biggest majority (40%) seemed

unsure and “Somewhat agreed and disagreed” with the idea that cultural misinterpretation was a factor influencing disproportionality. While the majority of respondents were unclear about the possibility of cultural misinterpretations impacting more frequent disciplinary referrals for Black/African American students, they do not appear to believe that culture is a predictor of behavioral challenges. When asked if culture is a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at Olam, 50% expressed disagreement. Thirty-two percent indicated that they “Somewhat agreed and disagreed,” while only 16% indicated agreement. Part of this could be explained by the perception that the “culture” of Black/African students is not different from other cultures. One interviewee expressed this idea saying,

Mmm, I don't, I don't know. I don't know. I mean, you know, they, you know, they're, they're, you know, I don't think their culture is any radically different from any other culture, you know, I just think it's the choices they make. (105 H)

The topic of race resulted in a more definitive response from staff. When asked the same question about race, overwhelmingly, staff denied the implication of race being a factor predictive of behavioral challenges. Seventy-two percent “Disagreed” or “Strongly disagreed” with this statement, while only 16% “Somewhat agreed and disagreed,” and 12% expressed agreement.

In part, these finding can be explained by accounting for the lack of clarity surrounding the terms race and culture. One interviewee recommended that the terms needed to be defined for staff prior to taking the survey (631 X) and another asked during the interview, “help me understand what your difference is between race and culture”

(360 D). Regardless of the lack of clarity between race and culture, staff members tended to perceive “culture” as the most significant factor associated with differences in behavior and behavioral interpretations. When asked about the impact of race and culture on disciplinary outcomes, one individual explained,

Um. (long pause) I would say definitely culture. Um, you know, cause within a race, you know, there's, there's several cultures, you know, where, you know, how the child's been brought up, what they're comfortable with, what they've seen, what they're around most of their day. So, and subcultures within the culture, so, um. Definitely culture. Um, race (pause), I mean, I know it happens in the world, I know that. Um, but, you know, I don't feel like it happens here. You know, the fact that, you know, a kid just because of their race, um, is treated differently. But because of their cultural norms or their cultural, um, behaviors, I think that makes a difference for the kids. (344 D)

With further probing, it appeared that the interesting line drawn between race and culture was related to exceptions within the Black/African American racial group. The logic behind this claim implied that differences within the racial group must be accounted for by culture. Thus, not all Black/African American students engage in problem behaviors, so it must be a culturally related variable. One interviewee grappled with clarifying the distinction as follows,

D: Um. But yeah, I think, um, I think some of the culturally significant behaviors are more obvious, or more, uh, pronounced than someone's blackness, or someone's Hispanicness, or whiteness. Um.

C: Do you mean that teachers don't typically notice that the student engaging in those behaviors is black?

D: No, I think that would be naïve to. Um, you know, do they associate those behaviors with a black student that is black? Probably. Um. And, you know, I think, I think the problem is, you know, the different cultures within, like, say African Americans, the different cultures. You know, or they'll have, you know,

three or four, say, African Americans in their class that, you know, within the norms of their classroom behaviors. And then they have, you know, one or two that aren't inside the norms of classroom behaviors, you know, maybe a little bit more, um, honest, you know, with the culture that they're from, or, you know, that they draw their, um, behaviors from. And, you know, a teacher might look at those and say, you know, you know, both these groups are black, but they're still different, you know. What's going on. You know, why aren't your behaviors more like this group. (383 D)

Another staff member struggled after having identified certain behaviors, such as volume, as being associated with Black/African American students. The response offered seemed to clarify that certain behaviors are associated with Black/African American students, but they are about culture, not race. This was particularly perplexing, as the group having these attributions articulated was identified and described by race as Black/African American. As the interviewee continued to struggle it seemed that the ideas being expressed were specifically about "Black culture." When asked if that was correct, the interviewee responded,

Yeah, and I know you hate to say it like that, but yeah. Because I don't think they're thi—I don't think as a staff, or the majority of the staff, I don't think they're thinking that's a black kid saying that, or an African American kid saying that. It's a kid saying it, and not really even putting it with they're black. (930 Z)

These findings offer several interesting points to consider. First, the lack of clarity about the terms race and culture appear to be an issue that staff struggled with during the interviews and possible the survey as well. Based on individual conceptualizations of these terms, staff members seemed to believe that culture is more obvious and more directly related to student behavioral expressions and teacher interpretation than race.

However, similar to Ferguson's findings (2001), these reports also allude to the unwillingness of staff to acknowledge race as a factor related to discipline.

In contrast, several interviewees did openly share the belief that race does impact disciplinary outcome and behavioral interpretation within the school. One interviewee had observed "blatant racism" demonstrated by another staff member (321 X) and another had through conversations come to the conclusion, "That actually there may be some racism here" (435 Q). One individual connected staff member responses to Black/African American students with fear saying, "I don't want to say it's a racial thing; I think for some individuals, yes, it is. I think they're afraid of black males. They don't know how to handle them, so the first thing to do is I want you out of my class" (141 J).

There were several individuals who were willing to acknowledge the implications of race, which might be considered a form of resistance within this domain. Overall, it seemed as though staff was trying to convey the message that there are no innate differences based on race or skin color that contribute to differences in behavior or disciplinary action. They were, however, much more willing to attribute differences in behavior and outcomes to the culture of Black/African Americans. The challenge with these claims is they do not exist separately from race. They are intricately connected back to how the group was identified, which was on the basis of skin color. Appiah and Gutmann (1996) proposed that individuals do tend to replace "racial essences" with "cultural essences" in the wake of historically racist ideology (p. 83). They argued, despite the socially constructed nature of racism and the greater emphasis placed on culture, our contemporary society should "not have discussions of race in which racism

disappears from view” (Appiah & Gutmann, 1996, p. 82). If we do indeed now live in a “color-blind” society, then these statements seem to reflect the willingness to ascribe differences on the basis of culture, as outlined in the “cultural” frame presented by Bonilla-Silva (2006), while avoiding the topic of race even when the group being discussed was identified by race, which perpetuates inequity on that basis because it is not directly acknowledged. In the next section, several very real factors that are related to disciplinary outcomes were often utilized by staff members to side-step the focus on race.

Anything but race. Respondents to the Staff Survey were not certain that poverty was predictive of behavioral challenges. When asked this question, only 24% of respondents “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed,” 24% “Disagreed” or “Strongly Disagreed,” and the largest majority, 52% “Somewhat agreed and disagreed.” This finding seemed to be in stark contrast to reports from interviewees. Particularly when the topic of culture or race was brought up, the majority of interviewees tended to assert that socio-economic status was a significant factor associated with disciplinary outcomes and disproportionality in particular. Several expressed statements such as, “And, and it—yeah—and again, I think this really ends up being more about socio-economics rather than race” (470 X).

Many interviewees tended to interpret culture exclusively as class. One individual offered this clarification,

C: So then when, when you’re talking about culture, you’re talking about sort of the culture associated with their class, their socio-economic status?

H: Yeah, well, that’s how I’m looking at it because that’s basically where they are. You know. (475 H)

When asked if class was a significant predictor of disciplinary outcomes, one interviewee asserted that it was not, claiming,

Well, no—well, you know, like I said, I mean, you have some kids that come from this culture that are good or bad. Some kids come from the poor culture that are good and bad, you know. I've seen plenty of kids that had nothing, nothing, no support at home, nothing, that do just fine. That are polite, respectful, made great grades, and gone on to achieve greatness. (475 H)

One interviewee voiced the implications of class by specifically articulating the belief that Black/African American students were more likely to come from a lower socio-economic standing. The individual said,

If you're, uh, if you're, if you come from a background that has you living in poverty and you've only got one parent and you have all these things against you, you're probably going to be, uh, doing a lot more disruptive behaviors by the time you get to the middle school classroom than someone that's had all the supports in place. And if you take a look at how that happens, if you're a white student, you're more likely to have supports in place; if you're a black student, you're much likely—more likely to be coming from poverty. So until society's issues work themselves out to a larger degree, you'll always have the school system as a microcosm of society. It will always have those problems. (195 F)

Differences in class existing between students and staff were perceived to exacerbate disciplinary outcomes. This was articulated, not as a difference in the behavioral response of Black/African American students who have a lower socio-economic status, but rather as a result of the staff being from a difference class. The individual claimed,

Um, it could be that; it could also be socio-economic. I think a lot of individuals here have—forgive me, but—have been fed with a silver spoon their entire life, so the aspect of coming to school hungry, or coming to school without any

electricity, um, they have no clue what that's like. So a lot of time when a student lashes out, or is not going to listen to you when you're in their face, it's because of what's going on outside of school. Um, and so I think it could be socio-economic. (141 J)

Other interviewees expressed concerns about the potential impact of gender as a factor contributing to disciplinary outcomes. One individual asked, "Does, um, the male female thing have anything to do with it?" (282 Z). Another individual explained the difference saying, "It's more, it's more boys than girls. Not just white or black boys, and white and black girls, I mean, it's boys versus girls. Boys need more time to, you know, you know, girls can sit more. Boys require a lot more activity" (269 H). This particular research study did not specifically examine the implications of gender on disciplinary outcomes. Researchers have documented the significant role that gender plays in disproportionality, but despite this interaction, gender does not fully account for the differences in disciplinary outcomes for Black/African American males and female (Skiba et al., 2002).

When examining these responses through the lens of the Four Domains of Power, it is important to recognize the way race was replaced by gender and class as the focus of the discussion about factors associated with disciplinary outcomes. Class and gender are related issues relevant to disciplinary disproportionality (Skiba et al., 2002). I found these assertions to be a valuable contribution to the conversation about disproportionality. What was most troubling was the way these topics seemed to take precedence or receive more credence than race. It often appeared that gender and class were used as a way to avoid talking about race. These particular findings point to the complex intersections of

identity for Black/African American students, where multiple factors can and should be considered, however, these factors singularly or together should not create complete diversions from addressing race altogether.

Cultural conflict. Staff members participating in the interviews consistently presented a description of the school culture that was shaped by cultural and racial factors. There was an acknowledgement that the school culture reflected the “majority group,” in this case, White, middle class, female. Statements about the nature of the school culture included phrases such as, “we’re in a white female culture” (221 Q), “largely middle class” (357 F), with similar “value systems” (357 F) and “upbringing” (221 Q). The conflict arises when the staff is unwilling or unable to see “that there could be an alternative way” (221 Q) and they want to apply principles from their upbringing to “every kid they teach” (357 F). The school culture becomes a mold representing the values of the primarily white, middle-class, female staff members, to which students are expected to transform into. One staff member explained the culture of the school saying,

for a lot of people, this is how—there’s one mold for how you’re supposed to be. One mold for how you’re supposed to behave; one mold for how you talk; one mold for how you walk; this is how it’s done; and of course that’s not the world that a lot of these students come from. And that will generate a lot of conflict. (345 F)

In addition to being singularly constituted based on the values and likeness of the majority of staff members, one interviewee expanded the assertion by suggesting that the dominant race defines the culture overall. The response offered was, “again, and you hate to say it, I mean, the way the majority of society and the school in that society works is

off of this, I guess, white cultur[e]—you know, everything is lined along that spectrum” (966 Z).

Staff members frequently cited the discrepancy between the perceived culture of Black/African American students and the school culture. The resulting conflict was explained by one interviewee as,

A disconnect between what’s acceptable behavior at home, what’s acceptable behavior with your friends, and then what’s acceptable behavior in the school culture. Um, and I think often times students will operate with what’s acceptable between friends, between students and teachers, and teachers, of course, read that as disrespectful. (245 X)

Beyond this perceived difference in cultural expectations, it was also considered to be a direct conflict with Black/African American identity to conform to school expectations. One interviewee asserted, “Being, being successful in school as a young black male is acting white” (331 F). The result of conformity to the dominant school culture was believed to result in rejection by one’s peers (331 F). This was thought to result in Black/African American students becoming “victims of their culture,” in which they are expected to conform to a culture that seemingly rejects the value of education (303 F). It is possible that certain behaviors demonstrated by Black/African American students are reflections of what Fordham and Ogbu (2008) referred to as “oppositional cultural frame of reference” through which Black/African American students might selectively, and purposefully engage in behaviors that directly conflict with the dominant cultural expectations within the school setting.

Another interesting finding within the Cultural Domain was related to staff member conceptualization about disruptive behavior. As previously mentioned, when asked if the behavior of Black/African American students is different from the behavior of White/Caucasian students, unanimously all interviewees agreed that the volume with which they communicate is louder. Consistently, staff members would ascribe these differences to culture, not race, with statements such as, “Um, I, I think African American males—well, females too, sometimes—they’re loud. And that’s really, and I think that’s a cultural thing, in a sense” (376 Z). Each interviewee acknowledged that this difference in volume could be contributing to more frequent referrals for “disruptive” behavior. Interviewees were then asked, “If ‘disruptive’ behavior is associated with the culture of Black/African American students, then would it be accurate to say that they might be receiving punishment for something related to their culture?” Responses tended to include statements of absolute agreement that students are being punished for a part of their culture in this case (220 Q) to statements of agreement that volume, disrespect, and culture are connected (942 Z). Other individuals expressed concern about the limits of accepting cultural differences. One person explained this challenge by saying, “I mean, if that’s what you want to say, but I still think—even if it’s your culture, I mean, if it’s my culture to carry around a gun, we have to show, teach people, teach kids what is appropriate for this environment” (625 J). This individual went on to grapple with the challenge of school behavioral expectations that appear to be in conflict with student’s culture. A tremendous conflict between the school culture and the student culture became evident when staff members believe that volume is a culturally related behavior for

Black/African American students and yet, those behaviors are then continuously punished. One individual exclaimed,

I really like how you said that—are we punishing them for their culture? Because if that’s the excuse we’re going to give for everything—it’s their culture, it’s their culture, we love everybody, cult—there’s no wrong or right culture, blah blah blah, then we punish them for their culture, what are you saying? Again, you’re not articulating, but again, what you think in your heart, it comes through in your actions. (651 J)

The challenge of exploring disciplinary actions in response to culturally defined behaviors is particularly problematic and has tremendous implications for the relationships that are formed between students and teachers. Reflecting on the perceived discrepancies between the school culture and the perceived influence of students’ families, seemed to highlight the implications of Ogbu’s Cultural-Ecological Model (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998), by suggesting there are both “school” and “minority community” factors that contribute to educational outcomes for Black/African American students.

Cultural awareness. Staff members tended to belief that there was a general lack of awareness of other cultures. Several staff members openly referred to the “ignorance” of other cultures existing with the staff at Olam Middle, similar to Helmes’s (Microtraining Associates, 2008) assertion that the largest majority of White/Caucasian individuals might be in the first stage of White Racial Identity, in which individuals are seemingly unaware of the implications of race and privilege. When it comes to culture, staff members were perceived as being “uneducated,” “unaware,” and having limited exposure to other cultures (481 Q). One staff member made assertions about staff

members and explained the need for staff to expand their values beyond their own isolated culture, saying,

They're ignorant. They're ignorant. Um, and, like I said, it's not—you can't, you can't help how you grew up and what you've been exposed to. Um, but as you get older, you can, um . . . you can learn more about different cultures, and you can't just be you and not willing to change. You have to be—I'm not saying open yourself up to where you change your standards and your morals, but you have to—you have to be what can I do to reach this child should be the question, versus they need to do this in order to conform to what I need them to do. There needs to be more what do I need to do to reach that child mentality. You're the adult. (188 J)

In response to these expressed cultural deficits, the majority of interviewees expressed the need for “cultural awareness” or “diversity” training to introduce staff to other cultural perspectives (869 D). One staff member specifically asked that the trainings include specific strategies and not just research findings (1151 Z). Overall, interviewee consensus indicated that teachers are less aware of cultures outside of their own, and could benefit from additional training and exposure in this area.

Younger and newer teacher perspective. The culture of the school might also be influenced by the number of years of experience or the number of years at Olam Middle School. Differences in perspective on certain items on the survey suggested that differences in perspective on certain issues could be related to these factors. Differences in perspective were found to be statistically significant between teachers who were newer (e.g. 1-3 years) to Olam Middle School and those who had served for a longer period of time (e.g. 4 or more years) in response to questions about whether Black/African American students had “less well developed social skills” ($F(4, 20) = 2.97, p < .05$)

which could be contributing to more frequent disciplinary referral (see Table D5). The newer teachers tended to disagree with this notion. The newer teachers were also significantly more likely than staff who have served at the school for a longer period of time, to believe that race can affect teacher interpretation of behavior ($F(4, 20) = 2.94, p = .046$) and significantly more likely to believe the school needed to create a comprehensive plan to address disciplinary disproportionality ($F(4, 20) = 5.96, p = .003$). Staff members with fewer years of experience overall tended to bring a different perspective about believing that Black/African American students do not have more “psychological/emotional challenges” ($F(4, 20) = 3.29, p = .032$) and that they are not “more aggressive” ($F(4, 20) = 5.59, p = .003$). The less experienced teachers were also more likely to agree with the need to have a comprehensive plan to address disproportionality ($F(4, 20) = 3.64, p = .022$). Therefore, these findings suggest the larger school culture includes variation in perception on certain disproportionality related concerns that is influenced by fewer years of experience or fewer years at the school. This could be the result of having been exposed to different school cultures or cultural awareness trainings prior to coming to Olam, or it could be the result of an influx of younger generation staff members who simply have a different view about race-related topics.

Cultural Domain Summary

The Cultural Domain has allowed for an expansion to the typical conversations about disciplinary disproportionality. It has highlighted the intersection of culture and race and filled the unspeakable void, where race used to be discussed, with a plethora of

beliefs about Black/African American culture. While gender and class have been repeatedly offered as factors accountable for differences in disciplinary outcomes, the Cultural Domain calls for those assertions not to be dismissed; rather, to be cautiously interpreted, particularly when they were expressed in such a way as to negate race as a factor all together. The inevitable conflicts that have arisen from the cultural mismatch between Black/African American student culture and the culture of the school has expressly called attention to the implications and impact of cultural mismatch, in a setting where the less powerful group is expected to conform. The Cultural Domain has offered a lens through which “cultural” frames (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) including staff perceptions about Black/African American student ability, family values, and volume level were openly explored. This examination also offered a glimpse into perceptions about race and racism, as well as the means by which staff avoid discussing race as an issue related to discipline. There were expressions of acceptance taking the form full acceptance of the existing cultural/race-related beliefs according to the school culture. There were also reports of hopelessness about the ability to change certain cultural/societal factors that could be considered a form of acceptance within this domain. Resistance within the Cultural Domain seemed to be typified by a willingness to confront and question the culture of the school. I did not get the impression that there were active forms of resistance occurring in the day-to-day encounters with cultural conflicts or racialized incidents. There was a sense of resistance conveyed in the assertions that staff needed training to address the lack of awareness and sensitivity to other racial and cultural groups. If the concept of culture has replaced race in a color-blind society as the

appropriate way to discuss racial differences, then this domain has been invaluable for opening a space where staff perceptions about culture can be critically examined.

Interpersonal Domain

The fourth and final domain is the Interpersonal Domain. Within the context of this study, this domain was the most difficult to evaluate. The exclusive focus on staff members and the data collection methods that were used pose significant limitations to accessing information and data about actual relationships existing between students and teachers. Instead, the evaluation of this domain within the current study has offered a lens through which staff member perceptions of the relationships that exist, in particular, between predominantly White/Caucasian staff members and Black/African American students were examined.

The interpersonal connections that are formed between students and teachers are influenced by many factors, including the beliefs and practices expressed in each of the other Three Domains of Power. Insights into the types and quality of relationships and encounters with staff members can offer valuable commentary about disciplinary disproportionality. Specifically, staff member perceptions about how teachers respond to cultural and racial issues, along with their awareness of meaningful relationships existing with Black/African American students will be shared.

Interpersonal Analysis

The findings within the Interpersonal Domain were drawn exclusively from the Staff Survey and the staff member interviews. I have conceptualized this domain to include teachers as a factor in the interpretation of race, culture, and behavior. In other

words, the Cultural Domain posed questions about the influence of race, culture, and behavior as factors; within this domain, I am examining how teachers interact with or are influenced by race, culture, and behavior. I believe the perceived influence of these factors on teachers has significant implications for the day-to-day interpersonal encounters with Black/African American students.

Racism or influenced by race. Similar to questions posed within the Cultural Domain, staff members do not believe that teachers' interpretations of behaviors are influenced by racism. The majority of respondents "Disagree" or "Strongly disagreed" that if disciplinary actions are impacting Black/African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to "racist beliefs of the teacher" (68%). Eight percent agreed and 24% were unsure. When asked if the race of students impacts teacher perceptions of their behaviors 68% disagree, 20% somewhat agree, and 12% agree. These responses suggest that blatant racism is not perceived to be a significant factor influencing disciplinary outcomes. Interestingly, 52% of respondents did not believe that race can affect teacher interpretation of behavior, but 24% somewhat agree and another 24% agree with this statement, indicating some uncertainty about whether teacher interpretations are free from influence on the basis of race.

It seemed that staff members were trying to assert that racism is not a significant factor that teachers are influenced by when observing student behavior. I contend they were reflecting the premise of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) that exists in contemporary society, through the assertions that overt racism is no longer the primary expression of racist ideology. Instead, the nearly 50% of respondents indicating that race

might be a factor that can affect teacher interpretation of behavior suggests that race is indeed an influential factor, but not through blatant, overt expressions.

Cultural interpretation. There were also mixed responses about how teachers might be impacted or influenced by cultural factors. The majority of respondents “Disagreed” or “Strongly disagreed” that if disciplinary actions are impacting Black/African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to “a cultural mismatch between the student and teacher” (40%), just 32% agreed and 24% were unsure.

When asked if most teachers at this school consider culture when interpreting student behavior the largest majority “Somewhat agreed and disagreed” (44%), while 24% disagreed and 32% agreed. These responses seemed to show a higher percentage of respondents being unsure of the influence of culture in teacher interpretation of behavior. They also seem to suggest that staff members are not certain that teachers are considering culture when interpreting behavior.

This has significant implications in light of the findings within the Cultural Domain suggesting that cultural beliefs held by staff members could be influencing teacher expectations and subsequent responses to certain behavioral differences demonstrated by Black/African American students. Those culturally based beliefs also appeared to serve as a way to explain why disproportionality exists, not as a result of race, but rather as a result of culture. Therefore, staff member perceptions indicating that teachers might be influenced by a cultural factors and uncertainty about whether teachers

consider cultural differences, indicates a critical component that must be considered when evaluating disciplinary disproportionality.

Meaningful relationships. Previous research has documented that teachers interact less and provide less praise for Black/African American students (Guerra et al., 1997). When Olam staff members were asked about relationships between staff members and their relationships with students, the majority of survey respondents agreed that most teachers develop meaningful relationships with Black/African American students. Most notably, a large percentage (40%) “Somewhat agreed and disagreed” with this statement. Based on subsequent interviews, many individuals suggested that there are certain staff members that have been able to establish relationships with Black/African American students but that “it’s not the norm” (706 D).

Younger and more “innovative” teachers were thought to have fostered a greater number of meaningful relationships with Black/African American students. Teachers who were innovative tended to apply classroom practices that allowed for more “interaction,” “movement,” and “communication” (575 D). Teachers identified as having meaningful relationships with Black/African American students were described by one individual as being,

Of a younger mindset. I mean, not even age-wise be younger, but just of a younger mindset—understanding popular culture, integrating popular culture into the curriculum, um, willing to try, um, different, um, models and methods for teaching. Um, they tend to be a little bit more innovative, um. (78 X)

Interviewees were not surprised by the survey responses because according to their accounts, not all teachers perceive the need for establishing relationships. One individual shared,

I mean, I would say there's probably a third of the staff who—I mean, when they're here, you know, they are very dedicated to their jobs and they want to teach and they teach to the best of their ability, and, um, but who don't care one way or another about relationship-building. (667 X)

Another interviewee explained by saying,

Um (long pause). I think we have, you know, some staff that are educators but in the strictest sense, and they're going to deliver, um, the content and they expect students to learn it. And the relationships are really secondary, tertiary, however you want to say it. I do, you know, think we have some people that, you know, I'm gonna teach these kids, they're gonna learn, and that's all there is to it. (1592 D)

To further validate that assertion, one interviewee cited time constraints as a contributing factor, while also indicating that it was the role of the counselor to forge meaningful relationships with students. This individual stated,

Well, it's hard for teachers to do that. Cause we don't have time to do that. I mean, you know, you know, during our, you know, we get a little bit, teachers get a little bit of a planning period, but most of that is sitting in meetings . . . or they're having to scramble to plan and grade papers, and things like that. I, I don't think teachers get enough time to be able to get into their kids like that, and find out what their problems are. That's why we have counselors. If I have a group of kids, you know, I can't just stop what I'm doing and go sit down and talk with this kid about it. That's why we have counselors. So the counselors can do that while I can continue the teaching environment. (711 H)

In addition, to the perception that teachers do not necessarily tend to connect the need to develop meaningful relationships with their role as teacher, one interviewee asserted that relationships were undermined by teachers' perceived authority. The individual stated, "I think that's something that's lacking is the relationship piece, whether it's black or white or purple. Um, there's very much I'm the elder, I'm in charge, you're the child, you do what I say. Without question" (755 Q).

Similarly, one interviewee conveyed concern about placing emphasis on relationships, rather than holding students accountable for their behavior. The interviewee seemed conflicted about the perceived imbalance between teacher and student responsibility. This expression was shared in the following statement,

Of course building relationships helps, um, with classroom management and, you know, having students understand your expectations and knowing where students are and how to approach them, and, um. But then, I mean, I hate to say I'm very old school too in the way that I think about things. Um, I think about how it was, you know, 20 years ago, and we weren't talking about building relationships with students. We had a clear expectation for academic success, um, and you either did it or you didn't do it, and that responsibility fell on you as a student. It wasn't the teacher's responsibility. Um (pause). So I don't, I don't know. I worry that sometimes we've gotten—in all areas of academics—that we're getting away from the student's responsibility to come—I hate to say conform, but yeah, I guess, come, conform, do what they're supposed to do, and get an education. So I—you know, torn. (672 X)

When considering relationships for Black/African American students who were most frequently involved in disciplinary actions, staff members tended to say this particular group of students does not have any meaningful relationships with adults in the school. The individual professed,

But (sighs) . . . I don't know. You know, when I'm thinking back on the frequent flyers, the frequent kids who get in trouble, I mean, it is, it's our black EC [students qualified to receive Special Education] kids. They don't really have, um, relationships with the adults. They don't have a mentor or a caring adult in the building. They're very much social within their own friend group, but I don't see them as really having any, you know, somebody looking out after them, or giving them advice. (784 Q)

Staff members do not appear to consistently be developing meaningful relationships with Black/African American students. Staff perceptions suggest the inconsistent presence of these relationships might be influenced by staff beliefs about their responsibility to form relationships, their beliefs about adult authority, or the belief that the focus on relationships undermines student accountability for their own actions. Overall, these findings suggest there are a variety of factors that are inhibiting or undermining staff awareness of the need to forge meaningful relationships with Black/African American students.

They have a relationship with the Black/African American administrator.

While staff members did not seem to believe that the majority of staff members form meaningful relationships with Black/African American students, they consistently reported those relationships were formed between the students and one specific staff member, the Black/African American assistant principal. Repeatedly individuals cited the positive relationships that have been formed between this particular assistant principal and students who are Black/African American also. One interviewee offered a reason for why the students tend to form relationships with this particular assistant principal saying, "They tend to, ah—some of them tend to gravitate towards Ms. [assistant principal], who's also a black female. I guess thinking that she will understand, or, um . . . be more

willing to listen, at least, to what they have to say” (784 Q). Apparently this same situation has taken place in the past with other assistant principals who were also Black/African American. One interviewee openly explained this tendency by recalling staff perceptions of relationships with former administrators. This individual recalled,

Now, and we have had, um, several over the last, oh, I guess five years, maybe? We’ve had one, two, three—three African American administrators. Um, and I—I would bet that most staff would say that special relationships were formed with African American students that were not formed with their white counterparts. (97 X)

The implications of this particular school administrator having the most reported relationships with Black/African American students had interesting implications. On one hand, staff perceptions about these relationships almost seemed to represent the fulfillment of the schools responsibility to establish meaningful relationships, as though the relationships formed by this assistant principal relieved them of any perceived need to take action to form similar relationships between White/Caucasian staff members and Black/African American students. On the other hand, staff members were also passively critical of this particular administrator’s disciplinary responses with Black/African American students. When asked about disciplinary practices, one interviewee referred to the actions of this particular administrator saying, “And I’m not saying—definitely not saying that our African American principal is racist. I don’t feel she is. But, if anything, I think she does sometimes, does take and tries to help them more than she should sometimes” (595 Z). Another individual shared the notion that the administrator’s relationships with students appeared to influence disciplinary outcomes. The individual

claimed, “that the relationships tend to be, for whatever reason, um, positive relationships between the students and the administrator. And therefore more opportunities are given to those students” (34 X). Thus, these relationships were perceived to be in some way connected to the issue of under-reporting disciplinary data for Black/African American students that was previously discussed within the Disciplinary Domain.

This assistant principal was the same administrator who processed 26% of all referrals (not attributed to a specific teacher) received by Black/African American students. This assistant principal was also the only specific individual cited as having actual relationships with Black/African American students. Staff members seem to have mixed feelings about this connectedness with students, both citing her and her relationships as evidence of meaningful relationships with Black/African American students, and at the same time, expressing the belief that her relationships allows students to have more flexibility in disciplinary outcomes.

Not only do staff members have mixed feelings about the relationships formed between the administrator and students, family members have shared an alternative perspective as well. It was reported by one interviewee that Black/African American family members have expressed concern about the isolated context in which their children are able to interact with individuals who are of the same race. An individual reported the family members’ concerns saying,

I had a parent come in just for example, said the only time my child sees a black person is if they need some clothes from a social worker, if y’all think they need some counseling, if they’re in ISS, or they’re getting in trouble from one administrator. That’s the only time my child sees a black person. Or if they’re cleaning up after everybody. (424 J)

It appeared that staff members and families have mixed feelings about the relationship between the students and the one Black/African American assistant principal. Staff members seemed eager to report it as a way to indicate that Black/African American students do have relationships with staff members. Yet, they also questioned how those relationships influence the disciplinary outcomes for Black/African American students, particularly when disciplinary responses were not considered sufficient. Family members of Black/African American students seemed to be reporting to staff members the insufficient racial representation of Black/African American staff members, while also indicating that when problems arise, it results in the few times their children are able to engage with someone of the same race. These mixed responses about relationships bring to light the perspective of same-race relationships and how they are perceived by staff members and families of students. Clearly, if the most significant relationships for Black/African American students are with the assistant principal who processes disciplinary data, it is possible that the value of that relationship could outweigh the cost of disciplinary outcomes for students, which could be impacting disciplinary disproportionality.

The misinterpretation of relationships. When asked for specific descriptions of relationships existing between White/Caucasian teachers and Black/African American students, staff members occasionally offered examples that lacked meaningful expressions or that could be interpreted as demeaning. One interviewee referred to the White/Caucasian staff member perception that rap music could be used as a strategy to

connect with Black/African American students. This individual argued against that claim asserting that individual learning styles matter more by saying,

again, you have to get to know these kids as individuals because they can say, you know, the whole thing, black kids like to learn through rap. But if you're gonna come under the impression that—okay, little black boy, I gotta rap to you now, or you're gonna listen to this rap thing—again, you have to learn each individual. Learn their—what are their learning styles regardless of their race. (712 J)

Another cited way that White/Caucasian staff members tended to apply strategies to foster relationships with Black/African American students by modifying the language they use when speaking to them. The individual reported,

I talk to many minority parents, many minority students who'll say things, you know. My teacher all of a sudden gets—we call it a “blackcent” when they're talking to a black child, all of a sudden they get a little accent to their voice, as if—girl, you don't—uh-uh—but when they're talking to a white student, it's yes, sweetie, how are you? You know, and I don't know if they even know they do that. (221 J)

Another way that relationships were described suggested they were essentially like personal projects of the teacher. One staff member described them this way,

Um, one of our male teachers, he always has we call it his projects. And he always seems to try to make those connections, um, usually with black males to help them and be a role model for them, and to do things for them. Um, sometimes it's not a black male, but we—again, we call them his projects. (1061 Z)

This individual went on to explain that many teachers tend to form relationships in this manner by suggesting,

Um, but, I think, as a rule, that every teacher does have those projects, those students that they do a little more for, try a little harder for, in a sense. Not because you dislike any of the rest of them, it's just—some of them touch you just a little differently. You see something in them; or, you know, they come to you personally and tell you something, and you're like, I gotta do something about this, or what can I do to help them? (1072 Z)

None of these particular approaches or conceptualizations to developing relationships between White/Caucasian staff members and Black/African American students is wrong; however, the misperceptions that lead teachers to believe that rap music is the only way to engage students, or speaking to them with slang, or referring to the relationships that are forged as a “project” could be rendered meaningless in the absence of genuineness and reciprocal, equitable encounters between both individuals.

What it takes to form a meaningful relationship. The value of relationships between teachers and students was expressed as a way to “enrich” the lives of students and teachers alike (166 J). Knowing the students seemed to be a critical factor for supporting and maintaining relationships that were meaningful, extending beyond standard school-related conversations. Staff members seeking to establish meaningful relationships would attempt to know the student, “their families,” “what they do on the weekends,” “their friends,” as well as the students’ interests which could include games, performances, or other recreational activities (355 J). In order to fully understand a different culture and begin to forge these relationships, several staff members reported the need to be “immersed” in the lives of their students and outside of the environment that most White/Caucasian staff members are accustomed to (388 J).

In discussing relationships with the interviewees it became evident that the conceptualization was not always about a reciprocal interactive experience, however, one interviewee claimed relationships have the most profound potential for impacting disciplinary outcomes, if they are meaningful and interactive. This individual affirmed the potential benefits of relationships for increasing awareness of racial and cultural differences by saying, “Um, because it would then be if you had a relationship, it would be a two way conversation, hopefully, so you would learn something from each other. Um, and like I said, I think the biggest thing is a lack of education and awareness on what it is not to be white (chuckles)” (798 Q). In addition, relationships could benefit from considering the factors other than just staff authority (355 J) or attempting to forge a bond that is not based on staff members expectations of student obedience.

One interviewee cautioned that staff member assumptions can undermine the development of meaningful relationships. This individual asserted,

Um, again, you get to know that child individually, not assuming that because they’re black, they come from a single parent home, or they, they’re broke, or they’re dumb, they don’t know how to read. You have to get to know each child individually. (166 J)

One individual offered key suggestions for how staff members can foster more meaningful relationships with Black/African American students. By talking with, listening to, and interacting with students, both students and teachers lives can be enriched. The individual asserted,

Two A’s—be aware, but don’t assume. And the only way you’re not going to assume is to have meaningful relationships, and within relationships you have to

have meaningful discourse. And it may be uncomfortable, and it may cause you to reflect, but if it's growth that's going to be the result, so be it (laughs). (856 J)

Relationships, in order to be genuine and meaningful, appeared to require staff members to put forth effort to know the student, beyond typical school-related encounters. These types of quality relationships seemed to call for awareness about the student without making assumptions and interactions that are reciprocal, rather than unilaterally based from the teacher's perspective solely. While staff members at Olam were able to articulate the factors that could foster such relationships, they do not appear to have sufficiently enacted many of these strategies at the time of this research.

Interpersonal Domain Summary

The Interpersonal Domain has offered a way to examine staff member perceptions about relationships between White/Caucasian staff members and Black/African American students at Olam Middle School. This domain has allowed for the examination of the impact of race and culture on teacher interpretation of student behaviors, as a way to consider the potential impact that such perceptions might have on the daily encounters that take place between students and teachers. Most importantly, the Interpersonal Domain has served as a way to examine staff member beliefs about the types and quality of relationships that exist between staff members and students. Certain characteristics, such as a "youthful" mindset and "innovative" strategies applied in the classroom were descriptions associated with teachers who demonstrate more significant relationships with Black/African American students. The descriptions of the relationship between the Black/African American assistant principal and Black/African American students,

allowed for critical examination of the way staff perceived these relationships as exemptive of their own need to form relationships, and simultaneously too lenient with disciplinary responses. The inadvertent ways in which White/Caucasian staff members undermine meaningful relationships with Black/African American students by applying stereotyped strategies, such as rap music and slang, or by conceptualizing them as “projects” evolved from this domain analysis. Finally, the specific ideology and beliefs that support the development of meaningful relationships, which included knowing the students and not making assumptions, emerged from examining disciplinary disproportionality through the Interpersonal Domain.

Within this domain, resistance might be typified by staff members who have found ways to foster meaningful connections with Black/African American students, including the assistant principal and other teachers who have found inventive classroom strategies to create more opportunities for connectivity and communication. Acceptance seemed to be most clearly expressed through staff member’s apparent contentment with Black/African American students having few, or no meaningful relationships with staff members, other than the assistant principal who is of the same race. Certainly, there might be some need or desire to connect with individuals who share the same identity, it is concerning that many White/Caucasian staff members did not believe there is a need to put effort in establishing similarly meaningful relationships that cross the bounds of the racial divide.

In conclusion, the Interpersonal Domain has offered an invaluable lens through which staff member beliefs can influence the types and quality of relationships that are

formed. Further, their perceptions about the need and manner in which such relationships should be formed could have a profound impact on the quality of bonds formed between staff and students. The power to decide what relationships between students and teachers should even look like is skewed toward the dominant cultural perception, which appeared to be based on authoritative roles and assumptions about students. While this study has examined beliefs about the staff as a whole, every aspect of the intricate connections between individual staff members and individual students is shaped by beliefs, several of which were shared within this domain. These broad beliefs about relationships impact disciplinary disproportionality because they appear to be communicating that staff members either do not perceive the need or do not possess the knowledge about how to make relationships with Black/African American students truly meaningful.

Analysis of the Four Domains of Power Model

As a way to conclude the inquiry of disciplinary disproportionality through the Four Domains of Power, the researcher analyzed the Four Domains of Power as global constructs, each representing a broad set of beliefs. To complete these analyses, items on the Staff Survey were combined into subscales that were then evaluated for similarities and differences across each of the domains. Overall, these analyses provided evidence of the extent to which the Four Domains of Power subscales reflected separate constructs and which Domains were most and least related to disciplinary disproportionality.

Relationships among ratings on the Four Domains of Power subscales are in Table D7. Ratings on the Cultural subscale were statistically significantly related to ratings on the Disciplinary ($r = .512$; $n = 23$; $p = .012$), and Interpersonal ($r = .455$; $n =$

23; $p = .029$) subscales. This finding suggested that the beliefs reflected in the Cultural Domain corresponded with beliefs in the Disciplinary and Interpersonal Domains when considering factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. To further clarify, as staff members express stronger beliefs about student culture, those beliefs are often associated with stronger beliefs reflected within the Disciplinary and Interpersonal Domains as well. This could be interpreted in two ways. Staff members might perceive that cultural beliefs about students actually have an influence on disciplinary and interpersonal encounters. It is also possible that these findings simply reflect that the strength of cultural beliefs is predictive of the strength of beliefs about disciplinary and interpersonal interactions. In either case, the Cultural subscale is correlated with all other Domains, except the Structural Domain. This missing connection to the Structural Domain might highlight the possibility that policies are perceived to be the least influenced by cultural beliefs. Nonetheless, I contend these findings lend credence to the need to evaluate the unique but interrelated beliefs about disciplinary disproportionality across each of the Four Domains of Power, in particular with efforts specifically examining the influence of cultural beliefs within and across all other Domains.

Means and standard deviations for participants' beliefs across Four Domains of Power subscales are in Table D8. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated ($X^2(5) = 25.23$; $p < .05$), suggesting that there are significant differences between the variances of differences for the Four Domains. Therefore, multivariate tests are reported ($\epsilon = .64$). These results indicated that beliefs were statistically different across domains of power subscales ($V = 0.79$; $F(3,19) = 24.28$; $p <$

.05; $\omega^2 = .10$). Follow-up tests showed that ratings on the Interpersonal subscale were statistically lower than those on all other subscales; ratings on Disciplinary and Structural subscales and Structural and Cultural subscales were similar; and, ratings on the Cultural subscale were different than those on Disciplinary subscale.

The finding that the Disciplinary and Structural Domain ratings were similar is not surprising, as they are intricately connected between policies and practices related to discipline. The Structural Domain having similar ratings to the Cultural subscale is surprising. This finding might be reflective of staff member efforts to identify the issues contributing to disciplinary disproportionality that have the least to do with staff members. To further explain, the Structural Domain was directly related to disciplinary policies and the Cultural Domain was reflective of beliefs about student/family values and tendencies. In other words, they were least reflective of the direct involvement of teachers. Thus, the similarities between the Structural Domain and Cultural Domain might be connected through staff member tendencies to rate these factors as most influential related to disproportionality because they highlight the influence of factors other than the teachers themselves.

Finding that ratings on the Interpersonal subscale were statistically lower than those on all other subscales could indicate that staff members did not believe that relationships were as significant a factor related to disciplinary disproportionality as the other domain topics. It could also be the result of social desirability (Randall & Fernandes, 1991) influencing responses, as teachers might avoid implicating themselves by suggesting that problems exist with the development of relationships with

Black/African American students. As the Interpersonal Domain was the most challenging to assess, it is important to note that these findings could also indicate items selected for this domain or the questions themselves might not be sufficiently representative of staff member perceptions about interpersonal encounters.

Interestingly, the subscale with the highest overall ratings, suggesting the domain items reflect factors that staff members strongly believe are contributing to disciplinary disproportionality, was found to be the Cultural Domain. This finding is not indicative of the actual influence of student culture on disciplinary disproportionality. Instead, it is reflective of staff member perceptions about why disciplinary disproportionality exists. The largest contributing factor to its continued existence is believed to be the students themselves and their families. The beginning of this chapter offered an in-depth exploration of staff members' beliefs about the culture of Black/African American students and described the vast chasm between the school culture and the perceived culture of students. Additionally, beliefs about Black/African American student race have been replaced by cultural beliefs. On this basis, along with the current finding that staff members believe that the most significant factor contributing to disciplinary disproportionality is reflected within the Cultural Domain, I assert that color-blind racism does appear to be a factor influencing the continued existence of disciplinary disproportionality, and most prominently through the cultural beliefs they have about the Black/African American students they serve.

In summary, similarities were found between beliefs on the Structural subscale and the Disciplinary and Cultural subscales. The subscales thought to be the least and

most likely contributing factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality were the Interpersonal and Cultural Domains, respectively. The strength of responses on the Cultural Subscale corresponded to stronger beliefs on the Disciplinary and Interpersonal Domains. Thus, each domain subscale appears to be measuring important and interconnected set of beliefs associated with disciplinary disproportionality.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the Cultural and Interpersonal Domains and evaluated the Four Domains of Power together as a framework for examining disciplinary disproportionality. Results presented within this chapter have explicated beliefs, awareness, and conflict related to race and culture, as well as factors influencing the relationships formed between Black/African American students and White/Caucasian staff members at Olam Middle School.

The Cultural Domain revealed the way in which the “Cultural Frame” of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) was frequently used to apply generalized statements about Black/African American student culture in order to explain the existence of disciplinary disproportionality. Such cultural beliefs included the perception that academic struggles and lack of motivation for students were significant factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. In addition, staff members overwhelmingly perceived that disciplinary disproportionality was the result of family related issues or lack of family support or involvement for Black/African American students. Staff members openly expressed the belief that disproportionality was influenced by Black/African American student families who do not value education. Such generalized

statements about the influence of culture on disciplinary disproportionality appear to have replaced statements of biologically based racial inferiority reflected in prior expressions of racism as the explanation for why disciplinary disproportionality continues to exist.

Staff members expressed confusion and uncertainty about the influence of culture and race on disciplinary outcomes. They expressed uncertainty about the impact of teachers misinterpreting cultural differences. Staff members also believed that culture is not likely a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at the school. In contrast, staff definitively asserted that race is not thought to be a significant factor associated with behavioral challenges. Interviewees helped to uncover the confusion that staff have about the conceptualizations of both race and culture. Nonetheless, respondents suggested that culture was a more significant factor in behavioral outcomes than race. Class and gender were frequently interjected as significant factors explaining disciplinary disproportionality, not as contributions along with race. Instead, they were offered in ways that sought to move the inquiry away from the topic of race altogether.

Resistance was observed within the Cultural Domain in the form of several staff members who did acknowledge the significant impact that race might have on disciplinary outcomes. Acceptance was most clearly observed in the broadly stated, generalized cultural beliefs about Black/African American student skills, motivation, and family values.

Staff members acknowledged the predominantly “White,” “middle class,” “female” culture of the school. These cultural values reflecting the majority were also recognized as contributing factors to the perceived discrepancy between Black/African

American student family culture and the overall school culture. Conflict was thought to arise from the expectation of student conformity to the predominant school culture. There were differences in the overall culture of the school reflected through responses from newer or less experienced teachers. Newer teachers working at Olam were less likely to believe that disproportionality was impacted by Black/African American students having less well developed social skills and were more likely to believe that race can affect teacher interpretation of student behaviors. Teachers with fewer years of experience were less likely to believe that disciplinary disproportionality is the result of Black/African American students having more psychological challenges or having behavior considered to be more aggressive. Both newer and less experienced teachers were also more likely to agree with the need for Olam to develop a plan for addressing disciplinary disproportionality.

Student volume was cited as a significant behavioral difference demonstrated by Black/African American students as a result of their culture, rather than their race. This tendency to be louder was thought to be related to the more frequent referrals for disruptive behavior. When asked if this meant that students were being punished for their culture, staff members cited the limitations to accepting all cultural values. Other staff members acknowledged the connection or conceded that if the behavior has been described as culturally-based and is subsequently punished, it does appear to reflect a punishment on the basis of a cultural difference.

Staff members frequently cited a lack of cultural awareness among the staff as a whole, as a contributing factor associated with disciplinary disproportionality. In order to

address this issue, overwhelmingly staff members expressed the need for cultural and racial awareness training. This could be recognized as a form of resistance in which staff members are actively identifying ways to respond to disciplinary disproportionality.

Within the Interpersonal Domain, staff members did not perceive racist beliefs of the teacher or the race of the student to impact teacher interpretation of behavior. There was some uncertainty about whether teacher interpretation of behavior was free from the influence of race, suggesting that staff members believe that race might be a factor, but not through overt, blatant racial expressions. There were mixed responses about how teachers might be influenced by cultural factors.

The majority of staff members were uncertain whether most teachers develop meaningful relationships with Black/African American students. Students with the most significant behavioral challenges were reported to have no meaningful relationships with staff members at all. Teachers with a younger mindset and those who were innovative with instructional practices were thought to have more meaningful relationships with Black/African American students. Many staff members reportedly did not see the need for establishing relationships with students. Time constraints and teachers' perceived need to maintain authority were also considered undermining factors for the development of relationships.

The only individual specifically identified as have meaningful relationships with Black/African American students at Olam Middle School was the Black/African American assistant principal. Staff members seemed to express mixed feelings about the impact of these relationships. Staff members cited the relationship as evidence of

meaningful relationships with Black/African American students at Olam, seemingly to relinquish them of them of responsibility or obligation to foster such relationships. Yet, they also offered critical comments about their perception that the relationships resulted in greater flexibility or reduced disciplinary outcomes for students.

Several barriers to developing meaningful relationships were uncovered, which included staff members misinterpreting approaches to fostering relationships. Staff members using rap music, speaking with a “blackcent,” or referring to relationships with students as “projects” appeared to be misguided efforts to connect with Black/African American students. In contrast, staff members suggesting that knowing the student outside of general school-based encounters and interacting with the students and families to become more familiar with their values and culture could favorably enhance the interpersonal interactions between staff members and Black/African American students. Staff members expressed the need to be aware of racial and cultural differences and refrain from making broad assumptions by becoming more familiar with the individual students.

Resistance was demonstrated within the Interpersonal Domain in the efforts of staff members who have developed meaningful relationships with Black/African American students through innovative teaching strategies or racial, cultural, personal factors or shared interests. Acceptance within the Interpersonal Domain was most typified by the quiescent response to the lack of meaningful relationships fostered with Black/African American students.

The Four Domains of Power has provided a comprehensive framework for examining disciplinary disproportionality within a color-blind context. Each of the domains has revealed unique factors potentially involved in disproportionate disciplinary outcomes, while also highlighting the interconnected nature of these complex factors. Similarities were found between beliefs on the Structural subscale and the Disciplinary and Cultural subscales. The Interpersonal subscale reflected beliefs thought to be the least likely contributing factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. The Cultural Domain subscale having the highest mean subscale score, reflected staff perceptions that cultural factors were thought to be the most likely factors contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. The strength of responses on the Cultural Subscale also corresponded to stronger beliefs on the Disciplinary and Interpersonal Domains.

In conclusion, evaluating a race-related topic, such as disciplinary disproportionality, necessarily requires a comprehensive examination of the ways in which racialized beliefs and perceptions have been transformed but persist within a color-blind context. The Four Domains of Power have offered an invaluable framework for expanding research beyond the disciplinary data or other isolated variables, to specifically consider the interconnectedness of disciplinary, structural, cultural and interpersonal factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality.

The final chapter will present the implications of drawing from this model to inform policy, practice, and future research efforts. It will also offer concluding thoughts for individuals, schools, and society.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION FOR THE FOUR DOMAINS OF POWER

If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. (Douglass, 1857, paras. 7-8)

Introduction

In the wake of the Civil Rights era, the conceptualization and lived experience of race and racism have changed dramatically. Contemporary race-related experiences are more subtle, covert, and insidious (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). For more than three decades schools have continued to struggle with disproportionality in disciplinary outcomes for Black/African American students (Children's Defense Fund, 1975) within a social context that no longer openly discusses or acknowledges the potential impact of race. Disciplinary disproportionality is about more than what discipline data alone can reveal. It is also about race. Therefore, the current study sought to critically examine disciplinary disproportionality through a framework that could uncover the implications of more covert forms or expressions of racism.

Specifically, this study was designed to explore disciplinary disproportionality through the lens of color-blind racism drawing from Patricia Hill-Collins' Four Domains of Power (Hill-Collins, 2009). This framework supported the examination of

disproportionality as it relates to disciplinary structures, policies, cultural beliefs reported by staff members, and relationships between students and teachers. As both, discipline and race, have been conceptualized as socially constructed systems of power, this study asserted that investigations of disciplinary disproportionality must necessarily examine systems of power related to both. Thus, each of the Four Domains of Power was designed to reveal staff member beliefs and perceptions regarding discipline and race, with the goal of uncovering the ways in which disproportionate outcomes on the basis of race are possibly maintained as a result of social constructions supporting existing power structures.

According to Skiba et al. (2002), “statistical disproportionality, in and of itself, [it] is not a certain indicator of discrimination or bias” and efforts to evaluate the impact of racial bias would likely “fail to capture bias . . . [as such self-reports] would likely be highly influenced by social acceptability” (p. 320). The current study attempted to overcome the challenge of identifying the influence of racial bias by examining disproportionality through the framework of color-blind racism in which the seemingly “non-racist” ideas and beliefs expressed by staff members would be expressed free from this form of censorship.

Methods

A comprehensive mixed-method study of disciplinary disproportionality was conducted at one middle-school in the Southeastern region of the United States. The methodology for this research included an analysis of the schools disciplinary data to reveal behavioral factors related to disproportionality and racial differences related to

disciplinary outcomes. Disciplinary policies and monitoring tools were evaluated to determine clarity and consistency in relation to behavioral offenses most frequently associated with disproportionate outcomes. A school-wide staff survey was conducted to evaluate staff beliefs about race, culture, disciplinary practices, policies, student factors, and interpersonal factors related to disciplinary disproportionality. The final data collection method involved seven staff member interviews to verify findings from other data collection efforts and to further expand the findings for each of the Four Domains of Power.

Findings

This study included results that validated the results of prior research efforts and added new factors for consideration to the existing discourse regarding disciplinary disproportionality. The following section will outline the findings as they correspond to each of the research questions. The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

- What can be revealed about disciplinary disproportionality by examining it through disciplinary, structural, cultural, and interpersonal domains (the Four Domains of Power) within one school setting?
- What are the beliefs and practices that contribute to disciplinary disproportionality?
- How are acceptance and resistance of disciplinary disproportionality enacted within disciplinary, structural, cultural, and interpersonal domains (the Four Domains of Power) within one school setting?

Examining disciplinary disproportionality through the Four Domains of

Power. Examining data through the Four Domains of Power offered a prismatic expansion of the conceptualization of disciplinary disproportionality. There are numerous complex factors that are potentially related to evidence of disproportionality, but staff member beliefs and perspectives are also significant factors for consideration. This framework has allowed for the examination of such beliefs and found disciplinary disproportionality to be maintained by power structures established upon deeply entrenched beliefs about the behavior, abilities, culture, and families of Black/African American students, which do appear to be influenced by race. Further, inconsistent policies and practices appear to allow those individual beliefs and interpretations to shape the ways staff members interpret and respond to student behavior.

The disciplinary data analysis for Olam Middle school was used to describe the characteristics and features of disciplinary disproportionality. These results showed no significant differences in the types of behaviors demonstrated by Black/African American students; however, Black/African American students were most often disciplined for subjective and less well-defined behaviors, most notably under behavioral descriptors such as “disruptive” and “other school defined offense.” Although the behavior of Black/African American students was not significantly different, they were more likely to receive exclusionary disciplinary outcomes, such as suspensions. These particular analyses substantiate the results of many previous research inquiries regarding evidence of disciplinary disproportionality (Brooks et al., 1999; Children’s Defense Fund, 1975;

Hinojosa, 2008; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba et al., 2011; Wu et al., 1982).

Overwhelmingly, lack of awareness was cited across multiple domains as a factor related to disciplinary disproportionality. For both, disciplinary practices and policies, staff reported lack of awareness, inconsistency, and lack of clarity as factors possibly contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. Lack of awareness about disciplinary issues and outcomes also appeared to be used as a strategy to deny and emotionally disconnect from the evidence of disciplinary disproportionality. Staff members frequently cited a lack of cultural awareness among the staff as a whole, as a contributing factor associated with disciplinary disproportionality. In order to address this issue, overwhelmingly staff members expressed the need for cultural and racial awareness training.

Inconsistencies within disciplinary practices and policies were thought to be significant contributing factors to disciplinary disproportionality. Often these inconsistencies were associated with differences in teacher tolerance, variations in expectations, and insufficient classroom management. One grade-level within the school reinforced the notion that stricter adherence to school and classroom rules appeared to result in fewer overall referrals, as their practices resulted in only 10% of all disciplinary referrals. The lack of clarity within the disciplinary policies for “Disruptive” and “Other School Defined Offences” appeared to result in responses that are primarily based upon individual interpretation, thereby contributing to a significant proportion of the disciplinary referrals received by Black/African American students.

When considering culture, staff members cited the conflict between the values of the predominantly “White,” “middle-class,” “female” majority and the perceived Black/African American student family culture, with an expectation of student conformity. There were differences in the overall culture of the school reflected through responses from newer or less experienced teachers expressing less negative conceptualizations of Black/African American student behavior.

When discussing interpersonal interactions, most staff members were unsure whether teachers at Olam develop meaningful relationships with Black/African American students, but the students with frequent behavioral challenges were reported to have no meaningful relationships. Younger teachers who demonstrated innovative instructional practices were thought to have more meaningful relationships with Black/African American students. Many staff members reportedly did not see the need for establishing relationships with students. The need to maintain the authoritative balance and time constraints were thought to preclude the development of such relationships. Only the Black/African American assistant principal was specifically reported to have meaningful relationships with Black/African American students. Mixed feelings were reported by staff members who cited the relationship as evidence of meaningful relationships with Black/African American students at Olam, while also offering critical comments regarding perceived reductions in disciplinary consequences as a result.

Based on a subscale analysis of the domains, similarities were found between beliefs on the Structural subscale and the Disciplinary and Cultural subscales. The strength of responses on the Cultural Subscale also corresponded to stronger beliefs on

the Disciplinary and Interpersonal Domains. Beliefs reflected in the Interpersonal subscale were thought to be the least likely contributing factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. In contrast, staff members perceived that items reflected in the Cultural subscale to be the most likely factors contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. This finding suggests that staff members believe that factors associated with the student, their culture, and their families are the most significant contributing factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. This contention highlights the prospect of staff member tendency to replace racially biased beliefs with culturally biased beliefs, thus suggesting the potential influence of color-blind racism regarding disciplinary disproportionality.

Using the Four Domains of Power as a model for examining disciplinary disproportionality has revealed unique factors potentially involved in disproportionate disciplinary outcomes, while also highlighting the interconnected nature of these complex factors. These findings suggest that the Four Domains of Power structure supports the revelation of the many intricately connected factors that contribute to the school-wide phenomena of disciplinary disproportionality.

Beliefs and practices contributing to disciplinary disproportionality. Staff members revealed numerous beliefs that served as reasons for denying and minimizing discussions about disproportionality altogether. Most notably, staff members tended to deny the existence of disciplinary disproportionality at Olam, despite being provided evidence to the contrary. Inconsistencies in disciplinary responses and questions about the quality and accuracy of the disciplinary data had a significant impact on staff

perceptions about disciplinary disproportionality and were often cited as a way to minimize the need to acknowledge or respond to disciplinary disproportionality. Another basis for denial related to disciplinary disproportionality was associated with staff members interpreting disciplinary disproportionality as the result of purposeful targeting of students on the basis of race. To refute the notion that they engage in intentional racial targeting of students, staff members frequently interjected other races into the discussion. These beliefs appeared to correspond with the color-blind racism frame of “minimization” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), by denying and minimizing the existence of disproportionality and the impact it has on Black/African American students.

Beliefs about discipline within the school were constructed in a way that appeared to be “fair” but could be contributing to disproportionate outcomes. Emphasis was placed on punishment in response to student behavioral violations with the overall school culture. There was also a tendency to believe that disciplinary outcomes were neutral in that they were merely natural consequences occurring in response to student behaviors. Staff members also preferred to maintain “fair” consequence systems by not considering alternative outcomes on the basis of race. These findings seemed to correspond with the color-blind racism frames, “naturalization” and “abstract liberalism” respectively (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

The “Cultural Frame” of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) was frequently used to apply generalized statements about Black/African American students. Staff members believed Black/African American student behavior to be more severe, disruptive, disrespectful, and aggressive. They also tended to believe that Black/African

American students tend to be louder and speak with a different tone, which was thought to contribute to higher rates of referral for disruptive behavior. A small sample of Black/African American staff members, in contrast, were significantly more likely to disagree with the notion that the behavior of Black/African American students is more disruptive, disrespectful, aggressive, or violent. Thus, race might be factor influencing teacher interpretation of Black/African American student behavior.

Cultural beliefs expressed by staff included the perception that academic struggles and lack of motivation for students were significant factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality. Overwhelmingly, staff members reported the perceptions that disciplinary disproportionality was the result of lack of family support or involvement, or other family related issues for Black/African American students. The belief that disproportionality was influenced by Black/African American student families who do not value education was also openly expressed by staff members. Thus, statements of biologically based racial inferiority appear to have been replaced by more generalized statements about the influence of culture as the explanation for why disciplinary disproportionality continues to exist.

Other beliefs revealed through the analyses suggested a great deal of confusion and aversion related to race and culture. Confusion and uncertainty was expressed by staff regarding the influence of culture and race on disciplinary outcomes. Staff members were not sure if teachers misinterpret cultural differences, but they believed culture is not likely a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at the school. In contrast, race was definitively not thought to be a significant factor associated with behavioral challenges.

Interviewees reported confusion about the conceptualizations of both race and culture. Respondents believed that culture was a more significant factor in behavioral outcomes than race, on the basis of their own conceptualizations. Class and gender were frequently emphasized in staff members' responses about factoring contributing to disproportionality. Typically, they were interjected in ways that sought to transition away from discussing the topic of race.

Staff members expressed beliefs about Black/African American student behaviors, which they attributed to their culture rather than their race. Student volume was consistently reported as a significant behavioral difference demonstrated by Black/African American students. This increase in volume was thought to be related to the more frequent referrals for disruptive behavior. Despite these acknowledgements, staff members expressed concern about openly accepting all cultural values. Other staff members conceded the connection between culture and punishment in this case and acknowledge the apparent prospect of punishing certain behaviors considered to be culturally-based.

With regards to interpersonal interactions, staff members did not perceive racist beliefs of the teacher or the race of the student to impact teacher interpretation of behavior. Some uncertainty was expressed about whether teacher interpretation of behavior was free from the influence of race, suggesting that race *might* indeed be a factor influencing behavioral interpretation, but most likely through subtle rather than overt racial expressions. Staff members reported mixed responses about how cultural factors might influence teachers.

The development of meaningful relationships could be undermined by several misguided beliefs held by staff members about approaches to doing so. Staff members using rap music, speaking with a “blackcent,” or referring to relationships with students as “projects” appeared to be ill-contrived efforts to connect with Black/African American students. It was suggested that knowing the student outside of general school-based encounters and interacting with the students and families to become more familiar with their values and culture could drastically improve the relationships between staff members and Black/African American students. Awareness of racial and cultural differences and refraining from making broad assumptions by becoming more familiar with the individual students were also strategies cited as critical for fostering meaningful relationships.

Such personal, value-laden, and biased beliefs are maintained within the power structure of the individual school which, not only condones such beliefs, but quite possibly perpetuates them. This model has offered a lens through which unspoken and unrecognized beliefs and patterns of responding were shown to be unwittingly associated with the on-going evidence of disciplinary disproportionality.

Acceptance and resistance within the Four Domains of Power. Acceptance across the Four Domains of Power offered interesting insights about the perpetuation of disproportionate outcomes. Within the disciplinary domain, acceptance was most reflected through acceptance of disproportionate outcomes for Black/African American students and the denial of disproportionality altogether. Staff members also appeared to demonstrate a level of acceptance regarding the inconsistencies found within disciplinary

policies. There was a general sense of complacency about the need to respond to disciplinary disproportionality and address inconsistencies in practice and policy. Within the Interpersonal Domain acceptance was most typified by the acknowledged lack of meaningful relationships fostered with Black/African American students. Acceptance was also observed in the open disclosure of generalized cultural beliefs about Black/African American student behavior, their abilities, their motivation, and their family values. Acceptance of existing practices, policies, beliefs, and outcomes regarding disciplinary disproportionality could be significantly undermining the impetus to consider and respond differently to factors contributing to disciplinary disproportionality.

Resistance was often demonstrated through isolated or projected examples. Within the disciplinary domain, the real or perceived differences in behavior demonstrated by Black/African American students might be considered a form of resistance through personal, racial, or cultural expressions of self-identity or resistance to the system attempting to enforce conformity. Alternative consequences that were possibly offered in response to student behavior by school administrators could also be considered a form of resistance through the intended effort to reduce exclusionary outcomes. For staff members who did not accept policy inconsistencies, resistance might be manifested through staff efforts to ask for clarity, consistency, and examples. Within the Cultural Domain, resistance was observed in the form of several staff members who did acknowledge the significant impact that race might have on disciplinary outcomes. Staff members who expressed the need for cultural awareness training could be reflecting a form of resistance by actively identifying strategies to redress disciplinary

disproportionality. Resistance could also be reflected through the efforts of staff members who have developed meaningful relationships with Black/African American students through innovative teaching strategies or racial, cultural, personal factors or shared interests.

Discussion

Several of the findings revealed by this study have challenged pre-existing views about disciplinary disproportionality. The perception that disciplinary disproportionality is not related to race has been directly refuted. When questions about race and discipline merely include the word race it appears to influence a tendency to deny or minimize staff member responses. In contrast, when asking questions about a group of individuals *who have been identified by their race*, staff members willingly oblige by offering answers that reveal their beliefs about the culture of the racial group previously identified, while still avoiding the topic of race. In the era of color-blind racism, such beliefs about the culture of minorities have replaced blatantly racist beliefs and stereotypes regarding racial inferiority. Overwhelmingly, staff members expressed numerous value-laden, biased, generalized beliefs about a racial group (Black/African American students), by conceptualizing their beliefs as cultural, rather than racial.

To further consider the influence of race consider the finding that Black/African American staff members do not believe the behavior of Black/African American students is more disruptive, disrespectful, aggressive, or violent. This finding suggests that student behavior is indeed subject to different interpretations influenced by race. Given, the greater likelihood of students at Olam to have their behavior interpreted by staff members

who do not share their racial identity, their behavior is more often evaluated by staff members who believe their behavior to be significantly more problematic. Thus, the race of students and the race of the teachers interpreting student behaviors matters when considering disciplinary disproportionality.

Another view challenged by this research is that disciplinary disproportionality can be investigated or responded to as a disciplinary event only. This research project challenges the notion that only disciplinary issues are involved with disciplinary disproportionality. Understanding disproportionality and beliefs about students, culture, and race play a significant role in the overall complex epidemic of disproportionality. I assert that this oversight has served to maintain disproportionality throughout the nearly four decades since its discovery, despite continued research efforts focusing on disciplinary data and practices.

This study has offered new insights for the field by demonstrating evidence of color-blind racism in relation to disciplinary disproportionality. Not only were each of the frames of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) evident in staff member responses, but the Four Domains of Power (Hill-Collins, 2009) framework uncovered numerous practices and beliefs thought to be associated with disproportionate outcomes. Most insidiously, staff member beliefs about Black/African American student behavior, culture and families appear to reflect these seemingly “non-racial” stereotyped discriminatory statements as a way to explain the discrepant outcomes for Black/African American students, by essentially blaming them. Thus, findings from this study offer a framework

for revealing the covert operations occurring within color-blind racist contexts regarding disciplinary practices.

Limitations. While the current study has offered new insights to the field, there are several limitations regarding interpretation and generalization that must be considered. The limitations result from the study site, concerns about disciplinary data, the Staff Survey, measures of the Interpersonal Domain, and myself as a researcher.

In order to manage the comprehensive, in-depth data analyses, only one school site was investigated. The results offered a contextually rich and thoroughly descriptive narrative about the many complex factors associated with disciplinary disproportionality; however, this description of disciplinary disproportionality represents one school. The specific demographic and cultural characteristics of Olam Middle School might pose significant limitations on the interpretation of these findings. This research is limited to the exploration of the topic of disciplinary disproportionality in this one specific middle school in the Southeastern region of the United States. The generalization of these findings in broad brush strokes across other schools would be a gross misinterpretation and misuse of the data.

Another factor that might serve as a limitation for the current investigation is the possible influence of incomplete or inaccurate disciplinary data collection methods within the school. As previously described in Chapter IV, staff members expressed a great deal of concern about the quality and accuracy of the disciplinary data. While I tried in earnest to validate those claims, it was not possible to determine if the disciplinary data for Olam Middle School was impacted by omissions and under-reporting. As a result, the

disciplinary data analysis might have been influenced by such practices. This possibility might have had the greatest impact on the findings related to the Disciplinary and Structural Domain, although data integrity regarding disciplinary incidents has limiting implications for the entire study.

The Staff Survey was intended to measure numerous factors related to disciplinary disproportionality across each of the Four Domains of Power. Another possible limitation results from the construction of the survey items. Prior to this study, there was no instrument designed to measure the specific factors outlined in the inquiry. As a result, this survey was constructed to fulfill this task, but has not been tested for reliability and validity. Results of the survey were presented in corresponding results sections by individual item with the range of responses for each specific question in order to offset the limit imposed by constructing a survey. Further, having completed this analysis, I believe that additional modifications need to be made to the survey in the future in order to assist with summarizing, subscale analysis, and question content. In addition, I believe the survey might be strengthened by adding a component that will specifically assist with comparing and contrasting factors related to teachers and those related to students.

The analysis of the Interpersonal Domain was influenced by several limitations. First, no direct assessments of the characteristics or quality of relationships were conducted. Second, the data regarding this domain was exclusively drawn from staff member survey responses and interviews, as no student reports were included. This significantly limits the ability to consider whether the findings reported in this domain are

a complete and accurate portrayal of relationships between staff members and Black/African American students. The findings should be interpreted as staff member perceptions about those relationships, rather than evidence of those interactions.

Finally, this research inquiry is limited by my own interpretations. I have sought to validate findings and verify my interpretations through the use of multiple data sources. Nonetheless, I have a significant role in the way the findings of this research have taken shape, and the manner in which they are organized and reported reflect my influence on this research as a part of the investigation process.

Implications. In spite of the limitations previously described, or any inadvertently overlooked, these research findings have significant implications regarding the prospect of achieving true equality and fulfilling our democratic ideals. This research project has educational implications that are inextricably linked to broader society through the exploration of inequality. Specifically, the findings from this study present the opportunity for critical engagement with socially constructed concepts and they provide a framework for responding to disciplinary disproportionality.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study do not provide the solution for responding to disciplinary disproportionality; instead they offer the opportunity to engage in a messy, complex, and controversial struggle for justice. The findings from this study call for educators to be asked challenging questions that reveal the hidden discourses about race, culture, and disciplinary disproportionality. These questions ask about the influence of culture on teacher interpretation on student behavior. They ask that beliefs about students of minority racial groups be fully exposed, as they no doubt have an

impact on student behavior, relationships, and outcomes. The findings also propose that efforts to explain and respond to disciplinary disproportionality in a color-blind society must confront efforts to avoid discussing race and draw upon the theory of color-blind racism to identify vestiges of racism. And finally, the findings ask that policies, practices, beliefs, and encounters be critically examined for any potential discrepancies or unintended biases that perpetuate disproportionate outcomes. The overall findings from this study at Olam Middle School have minimal implications, when compared to the value of the answers to these aforementioned questions from educators about their own beliefs, school, and social setting.

Resistance and the Four Domains of Power. While the findings from this study are not intended to offer a specific solution for addressing disciplinary disproportionality, the greatest implication from the findings lies in the prospect of developing a model for resistance or responding to disciplinary disproportionality. Each of the Four Domains of Power analyses revealed significant concerns regarding a variety of interconnected factors possibly influencing the occurrence of disciplinary disproportionality. The Four Domains of Power model could be utilized as a framework for responding to these areas of concern; thereby ensuring a comprehensive response. Utilizing the same framework for evaluating and responding to disciplinary disproportionality ensures that efforts can be customized to meet the unique needs of schools.

The Four Domains of Power framework might be utilized across each of the domains by selecting strategies that correspond to any emergent challenges revealed through the analyses. For example, within the Disciplinary Domain, concerns about

inconsistencies and insufficient classroom management could be addressed by providing professional development on that topic or adopting school-wide approaches to addressing discipline. Within the Structural Domain, the lack of clarity within and across the various policies might be addressed by drafting policy revisions to clearly define behaviors and provide examples, particularly in response to the subjective behaviors most associated with disproportionality. The Cultural Domain revealed significant concerns about the beliefs that staff members have about Black/African American students. In response, the school could provide cultural awareness training to staff members. The Interpersonal Domain revealed challenges associated with staff members developing relationships with Black/African American students, which could be responded to by providing staff with resources and time during the school day or after to school to foster meaningful relationships. It should be noted that this list of examples is by no means comprehensive, nor has it sufficiently addressed all relevant findings across each of the domains. It is merely offered as a brief example of how schools can utilize findings from the Four Domains of Power analysis to select strategies that correspond to areas of need. Obviously the needs, resources, strategies, and approaches would be school-specific; thus, a school-based team with appropriate demographic representation or the whole school staff might be most successful in efforts to identify appropriate responses to disciplinary disproportionality across the Four Domains of Power.

Areas for further development. There are several aspects of this study that give rise to future prospects. Improved instrumentation, inclusion of other perspectives, and

repeating the study with the additional evaluation of the model for responding are necessary considerations for future research endeavors.

In the future, changes to the organization and content of the Staff Survey could greatly enhance the quality of the data and ease with which the data can be analyzed. The survey needs to be revised in order to improve the efficiency and utility of the subscales. In addition, I would like to add a secondary subscale analysis that specifically evaluates the factors teachers believe are contributing to disciplinary disproportionality for whether these factors place the oneness on predominantly students or teachers.

Future research efforts should strive to include the “small voice” of students. This discourse about power and the ability to shape and construct disciplinary interactions within schools is not exclusive to teachers. Though students, particularly minority students, do not likely have the power to “construct” disciplinary practices and policies; they are not powerless. Students are actively involved in the cultural struggles playing out in school settings, engaging in behavioral forms of resistance, and interacting with staff members. Their voice would be a significant contribution for further validation and expansion of the Four Domains of Power model for examining disciplinary disproportionality.

To expand this study in the future, I plan to continue examining disciplinary disproportionality through the Four Domains of Power at one or more schools. I believe the repeated assessment of the findings from this study would be a beneficial contribution to the field. In addition, I intend to add the intervention or response component to the research effort, in which the school will utilize the framework for developing appropriate

strategies and techniques to respond to evidence of disproportionality. The Interpersonal Domain measures for the future study will be expanded to capture more about the quality and characteristics of the relationships between staff members and Black/African American students. Overall, future efforts will carry forward the findings from this study, while attempting to expand and improve the benefit of utilizing the Four Domains of Power model for evaluating and responding to disciplinary disproportionality.

Conclusion

Disciplinary disproportionality plays a critical role in maintaining racially inequitable outcomes that undermine the tenets of equality upon which our democracy is premised. The possible progression of negative outcomes resulting from disproportionality can be traced from exclusionary outcomes to disengagement from school (Hawkins et al., 2004), lower academic performance (Gregory et al., 2010), dropping out of school (Mendez, 2003), unemployment, and incarceration (Children's Defense Fund, 2011) observed at higher rates for those most affected, Black/African American students. Evidence of the continued existence of disciplinary disproportionality decades after school desegregation and decades after its discovery must no longer be interpreted as a subsidiary consideration. Findings of disciplinary disproportionality must be interpreted as a *demand* for justice. Discovery of disproportionality must *demand* that educators take part in the struggle to achieve equity in disciplinary and educational outcomes for all students. Without this demand, I believe for years to come we will continue to experience disproportionality resulting from and maintained by unchallenged power structures.

Evidence of color-blind racism is no indication of moral or social progress. It does not reflect equality on the basis “color,” nor does it represent “blindness” to color. Not one participant in this study had difficulty identifying students by color or describing factors and attributes that explain the inequitable outcomes bestowed upon them. If anything, color-blind racism is far more insidious. It is much more difficult to identify. Most problematic is the extent to which denials prevent the mere discussion of the topic of race. Despite many indicators of progress in race-related issues since the Civil Rights Era, color-blind racism is a vile mutation of the previous expressions of racism, less-easily identified, but nonetheless baleful.

Racism, as blatant, covert, or other undiscovered iterations, is a societal problem. The color-blind racism observed within an educational setting is a reflection of this broader social context. Given, Foucault’s (Gutting, 2005) perspective that power should be deconstructed locally, social change might be most effectively addressed within smaller social settings, such as schools. Clearly, schools are not the only site where color-blind racism can or should be addressed; however, as institutions thought to be responsible for educating participants in our democracy, schools certainly have a unifying and transformative capacity, unlike any other system in our society.

In Paulo Freire’s (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Richard Shaull asserted, “There is no such thing as a neutral education process” (p. 15). The educational process either supports the “integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system” or it becomes a “process of freedom” (Shaull, as cited in Freire, 1970, p. 15). Therefore, we must ask if we intend to perpetuate the inculcation of future generations

with racially discriminatory beliefs and perspectives, or if we will strive to educate for freedom. Lack of awareness about color-blind racism cannot be offered as an excuse by educators for on-going evidence of the consequence of racially biased beliefs, for this would reflect an educational system continuing to integrate not only students, but also educators into the “logic of the present system” (Shaull, as cited in Friere, 1970, p. 15). There is no neutral ground here. When considering color-blind racism, educators are either on the side of freedom and equality, or they are not.

Despite the historical legacy and current on-going struggle to achieve equality in our educational institutions, I believe it is possible for schools to achieve and maintain educational equality. Indeed, educational opportunities, through schools or otherwise, offer the only glimmers of hope for true justice and equality in our society. If meaning is made through a process of social construction, schools offer the prospect of deconstructing and re-constructing society through yet unimagined possibilities, as they are most fundamentally purveyors of knowledge. Schools have historically demonstrated the ability to transform aspects of broader society. Consider how *Brown v. the Board of Education* (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483, 1954) was utilized more than half a century ago to support the transformation of societal race-relations and racial interactions. Despite the limitations and challenges that can be cited regarding the success of school desegregation efforts that followed, schools across the Nation played a significant role in changing how our society engages on the basis of race. While it will be much more daunting to change underlying beliefs and covert expressions about other races, such as those observed in color-blind racial contexts, schools must recognize the

significant influence their efforts to respond to inequality can and do have on the lives of individuals and on society as a whole.

Educators must embrace the struggle of exploring the impact of controversial and value-laden topics related to race and culture to determine the beliefs and practices that are contributing to disproportionate outcomes for Black/African American students. Through these monumental deconstructive efforts, power can be wielded in a manner that seeks balance and equity for those with the least.

The efforts and responsibility for responding to disciplinary disproportionality offer the prospect of justice and hope for our society. The transformation from color-blind racism to racial equality is daunting, but possible. To draw from the sage insights of Svi Shapiro (2006),

Of course, the task before us and our children, to transform the world of so much unnecessary suffering, hurt, indignity, and injustice is too great for any one person to contemplate addressing. It is clearly a task that must employ the minds and bodies of many of us if change is to come. We must teach the value of our participation in the task of *Tikkun Olam*—the repair and healing of our world—without either the sense of futility that may come from minimizing what we can do, or exaggerating the contributions that one individual may make. (p. 204)

I would like to offer hope for Olam Middle School and all other schools impacted by disciplinary disproportionality. The struggle for equality will always be work that seeks to make the world freer. Though these efforts involve individuals, the demand for a response to disciplinary disproportionality is presented to every individual, as no one is free from the responsibility to engage in this struggle for our students, for our democracy, and for our world.

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APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENTATION

Staff Survey

This survey is designed to collect information about student discipline and disciplinary disproportionality in this school. Disciplinary disproportionality occurs when students of one particular race receive more frequent disciplinary responses than students of other races. This survey is designed to collect data about the whole school, rather than individual staff members' beliefs. Please remember to consider the whole school when responding, rather than only providing your personal beliefs.

Your responses to this survey are completely anonymous. Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time without consequence.

1. Describe your role in the school: teacher, teacher assistant, student services support, cafeteria and custodial, bus driver, other, no response.
2. How many years have you served in that role?: 1-3, 4-7, 8-12, 13-20, 21+
3. How many years have you served at this school?: 1-3, 4-7, 8-12, 13-20, 21+
4. Which racial or ethnic description best describes you? Race: Hispanic, African American, Asian, Caucasian, Bi-racial, Other:

Based on your experiences and observations in this school, please respond to each statement based on a 5-point scale indicating your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

1. Disciplinary policies (Code of Conduct or Student Discipline Handbook) are followed consistently for all students.
2. Disciplinary rules (classroom rules or school-wide rules for expected behaviors) are implemented consistently by all staff.
3. Disciplinary responses (In-school, Out-of school suspensions) are administered fairly and consistently for all students.
4. Our school disciplines African American students more frequently than students of other races.
5. Disciplinary disproportionality is a significant concern for our school.

The next section will ask questions about the behavior of African American students in this school.

6. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more severe.
7. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more disruptive.
8. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more disrespectful.
9. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more aggressive.
10. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more violent.
11. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school they seem to have more psychological/emotional challenges.
12. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school they seem to have less developed social skills.
13. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school they seem to get caught more.
14. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school they seem to be watched more closely by staff.
15. If African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school other: please describe. (text box)

The next section will ask questions about why you think African American students in this school are disciplined more frequently.

16. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to a cultural mismatch between the student and teacher.
17. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to domestic issues in the student's home.
18. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to lack of family support.
19. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to lack of parent/family involvement.
20. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to racist beliefs of the teacher.
21. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to zero tolerance policies.
22. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to academic struggles for the student.
23. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to psychological/emotional challenges for the student.

24. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to misinterpreting cultural differences.
25. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American students more frequently, it is possibly due to other: please describe (text box)

The last section will ask questions about what factors you think should be considered in order to better understand behavior and disciplinary issues at this school.

26. To better understand the reasons for more frequent disciplinary responses for African American students the following topics should be considered: (check all that apply)

- types of problem behavior African American students receive referrals for
- home/family issues
- student/teacher relationships
- racism
- teacher awareness of racial and cultural differences
- disciplinary policies
- student's behavioral/emotional needs
- school climate
- consistency of rule enforcement
- fairness of disciplinary policies/practices

27. Race can affect teacher interpretations of student behavior at this school.
28. Culture can affect teacher interpretation of student behavior at this school.
29. The race of students impacts teacher's perceptions of their behaviors at this school.
30. Culture is a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at this school.
31. Race is a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at this school.
32. Family values and support are significant predictors of behavioral challenges at this school.
33. Lack of personal motivation to succeed is a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at this school.
34. Poverty is a significant predictor for behavioral challenges at this school.
35. Most teachers at this school consider culture when interpreting student behavior.
36. Most teachers in this school develop meaningful relationships with African American/ Black students.
37. It is fair to implement different disciplinary actions for African American/ Black students in order to prevent disciplinary disproportionality.
38. It is important that this school develop a comprehensive plan to address disciplinary disproportionality.

Administrator Interview

This interview will focus on disciplinary practices and data for this school. Specifically, I will be asking questions about disciplinary disproportionality to better understand your thoughts about this issue. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may discontinue without consequence at any time. I have reviewed the informed consent form with you. Do you have any questions before we begin?

- How long have you been a school administrator?
- Can you please tell me the race you identify most with?
- How do you summarize and use your office discipline referral data?
- What does the data tell you about discipline in this school?
- What does it tell you about student behavior in this school?
- Tell me about the school's code of conduct. Is it followed consistently for all students?
- Tell me about the school rules and regulations. Are they followed consistently by all staff? Do they apply to all students fairly?
- Do the existing rules and policies impact disciplinary disproportionality?
- Do you believe that disciplinary disproportionality is an issue for this school?
- What factors do you think contribute to disciplinary disproportionality?
- Based on previous response, probe for additional information about the influence of student and teacher race, student cultural factors, family, class, relationships between students/teachers, policies, etc.

- Based on your observations, how is the behavior of AA students different from Caucasian students?
- What factors do you think contribute to these behavioral differences?
- Are there factors associated with teachers that might contribute to DD?
- Does student race affect the interpretation of their behavior?
- Do you think racism a factor that contributes to DD?
- What do you think could be done to address the issue?
- Do you believe that it is fair to discipline African American students differently in order to prevent DD?
- Do you have any existing plans to address DD?
- Do you have anything else you would like to share about DD at this school?
- Additional questions to be determined based on discipline data analysis and survey data results.

Teacher Interview

This interview will focus on disciplinary practices and data for this school. Specifically, I will be asking questions about student behavior and disciplinary practices to better understand your thoughts about this issue. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may discontinue without consequence at any time. I have reviewed the informed consent form with you. Do you have any questions before we begin?

- How long have you been a teacher?
- Can you please tell me the race you identify most with?
- Tell me about the school's code of conduct. Is it followed consistently for all students?
- Tell me about the school rules and regulations. Are they followed consistently by all staff? Do they apply to all students fairly?
- Do the existing rules and policies impact disciplinary disproportionality?
- Do you believe that disciplinary disproportionality is an issue for this school?
- What factors do you think contribute to disciplinary disproportionality?
- Based on previous response, probe for additional information about the influence of student and teacher race, student cultural factors, family, class, relationships between students/teachers, policies, etc.
- Based on your observations, how is the behavior of AA students different from Caucasian students?
- What factors do you think contribute to these behavioral differences?
- Are there factors associated with teachers that might contribute to DD?

- Does student race affect the interpretation of their behavior?
- Do you think racism a factor that contributes to DD?
- What do you think could be done to address the issue?
- Do you believe that it is fair to discipline African American students differently in order to prevent DD?
- Do you have any existing plans to address DD?
- Do you have anything else you would like to share about DD at this school?
- Additional questions to be determined based on discipline data analysis and survey data results.

APPENDIX B

CATEGORIES OF BEHAVIOR

Violent/ Criminal	Non-violent	Other
Threats, false threats, acts of terror	Non-compliance	Trespassing
Unjustified activation of fire or other alarm system	Dress code	Bullying and harassment
Fighting and physical aggression	Integrity	Hazing
Assault of an adult	Attendance	Extortion
Assault on student	Inappropriate interpersonal behaviors	Theft or destruction of school personal property
Possession of a weapon, firearm, dangerous instrument or destructive device	Use of tobacco products	Gang and gang related activities
Narcotics, alcoholic beverages, controlled substances, chemical and drug paraphernalia	Electronic devices	Aiding and abetting
Violation of NC criminal statutes	Bus misbehavior	Profane, obscene, abusive or disrespectful language or acts
Violent behavior	Misuse of equipment	Affray
Sexual assault	Disruption	Disorderly Conduct
Assault- other	Leaving class without permission and in unassigned area	Other school defined offense; other
Robbery	Prepared and on-time	Repeat offender
Unlawfully setting a fire; burning of a school building	Silence and standing during the Pledge of Allegiance	
Homicide	Food/drink prohibited	
Taking indecent liberties with a minor	On high school property	
Kidnapping	Bringing valuables prohibited	
Rape	Possession of counterfeit items	
	Use of counterfeit items	
	Immunization	
	Physical Exam	

APPENDIX C

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The language I have chosen to use to describe race will include dual descriptors for race, such as Black/African American or White/Caucasian. I elected to do this to account for the perception of interchangeability existing between descriptions of skin color and those that seemingly point to national origin. Because race is the primary issue relevant to this particular study, the descriptions of color were utilized in conjunction with the other racial descriptor. Exceptions to this documentation style will occur when direct quotes from other texts use alternative descriptions and when reporting data from sources which have defined the racial or ethnic groups in very specific terminology (Bennington, 2008, as cited in Okun, 2010; O’Conner & Kellerman, 2011).

Disciplinary Disproportionality is the term used to describe the inequitable distribution of disciplinary actions in schools (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008).

Exclusionary discipline includes the “use of suspension, expulsions, and other disciplinary action resulting in the removal [of the student] from the typical educational environment” as a consequence for inappropriate behavior (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010, p. 59).

Race is “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55).

Racism “is a system of power” (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 44) or a “way of organizing power relations that might range from extreme egalitarianism to systems of vast social inequality” and is reproductive of “social relations of dominance and subordination”

(Hill-Collins, p. 194). Racism is but one type of system of power which organizes around the concept of race. I contend race can further be clarified as skin color.

Risk Ratio is a comparison of the “Risk Index for the target racial/ethnic group and the risk index of all other groups” (The Equity Project at Indiana University, 2011). The Risk Ratio presents a quantifiable number indicating the level of over or under-representation of members of a certain racial/ethnic group to be included in a particular category.

Risk Index is a calculation of “the percentage of a given racial/ethnic group that is in a specific category” (The Equity Project at Indiana University, 2011).

Democracy: I prefer to draw from the authors who have recast Dewey’s vision of democracy to pose my own vision of democracy. In the context of the world that I live in and the beliefs that ground my beliefs and vision for this research, democracy is “a promising experiment” (as cited in Rorty, 1999, p. 119) in which everyone has an “equal opportunity to freely develop [his or her] capacities” (as cited in Kadlec, 2007, p. 13).

Power is “action on the action of others” (as cited in Flynn, 2005, p. 35). Foucault contends that power doesn’t actually exist as a “thing,” rather, “there are only individual relations of domination and control” (Flynn, 2005, p. 35). He cautions that power should not be construed as a negative or bad concept. In his view, power is productive in our forms of knowing (Flynn, 2005).

APPENDIX D

TABULAR RESULTS

Table D1

Characteristics and Disciplinary Patterns of Middle School Participants ($N = 611$)

Variable	Ethnicity					
	Black	White	Multi	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian
Population Enrollment	21%	63%	5%	10%	1%	1%
Number Referred	71	111	13	22	2	1
Number Enrolled	127	384	30	60	5	5
Percent Referred	56	29	43	37	40	20
0 Office Discipline Referrals	44%	71%	57%	63%	60%	80%
1 Office Discipline Referrals	20%	13%	13%	13%	0%	20%
2-5 Office Discipline Referrals	20%	11%	27%	18%	40%	0%
6+ Office Discipline Referrals	16%	5%	3%	5%	0%	0%
Risk Index ¹	0.56	0.29	0.43	0.37	0.40	0.20
Risk Ratio ²	1.82	0.60	1.21	1.03	1.11	0.55

¹Number Referred/Number Enrolled

²Risk Index for Ethnicity Group/Risk Index for All Other Races

Table D2

Categories of Disciplinary Code Violations for Black ($n = 302$) and White ($n = 398$) Students

Category	Ethnicity	
	Black	White
	n (%)	n (%)
Violent	45 (15)	44 (11)
Nonviolent	83 (28)	117 (29)
Other	174 (58)	200 (60)

Table D3

Specific Behavioral Offenses for Black ($n = 302$) and White ($n = 398$) Students

Category	Ethnicity	
	Black	White
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Other School Defined Offense	35 (12)	90 (23)
Disruptive	44 (15)	42 (11)
Bus Misbehavior	33 (11)	32 (8)
Inappropriate Language Disrespect	32 (12)	26 (7)

Table D4

In-School and Out-of-School Suspensions for Black ($n = 302$) and White ($n = 398$) Students

Category	Ethnicity	
	Black	White
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
OSS < 10 days	67 (22)	60 (15)
ISS	159 (42)	217 (58)
OSS > 10 days	65 (21)	57 (14)

Table D5

Means and Standard Deviations for Staff Survey Items

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
33. Lack of personal motivation to succeed is a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at this school.	4.24	0.72
19. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American/ Black students more frequently, it is possibly due to lack of parent/family involvement.	3.96	0.68
32. Family values and support are significant predictors of behavioral challenges at this school.	3.92	0.81
18. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American/ Black students more frequently, it is possibly due to lack of family support.	3.80	0.87
17. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American/ Black students more frequently, it is possibly due to domestic issues in the student's home.	3.64	0.81
22. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American/ Black students more frequently, it is possibly due to academic struggles for the student.	3.60	1.00
36. Most teachers in this school develop meaningful relationships with African American/Black students.	3.52	0.92
7. If African American/ Black students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more disruptive. ¹	3.40	0.82
23. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American/ Black students more frequently, it is possibly due to psychological/emotional challenges for the student. ³	3.32	0.85
6. If African American/Black students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more severe.	3.28	0.68
38. It is important that this school develop a comprehensive plan to address disciplinary disproportionality. ^{2, 3}	3.24	1.09
8. If African American/ Black students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more disrespectful. ¹	3.20	0.87
9. If African American/ Black students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more aggressive. ^{1, 3}	3.12	0.83
1. Disciplinary policies (Code of Conduct or Student Discipline Handbook) are followed consistently for all students.	3.08	1.04

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
34. Poverty is a significant predictor for behavioral challenges at this school.	3.08	1.00
35. Most teachers at this school consider culture when interpreting student behavior.	3.08	1.04
24. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American/ Black students more frequently, it is possibly due to misinterpreting cultural differences.	2.92	1.22
3. Disciplinary responses (In-school, Out-of-school suspensions) are administered fairly and consistently for all students.	2.88	0.97
5. Disciplinary disproportionality is a significant concern for our school.	2.80	1.12
21. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American/ Black students more frequently, it is possibly due to zero tolerance policies.	2.80	0.96
16. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American/ Black students more frequently, it is possibly due to a cultural mismatch between the student and teacher.	2.71	1.37
13. If African American/ Black students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school they seem to get caught more.	2.68	1.11
10. If African American/Black students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school their behavior is often more violent.	2.67	0.87
12. If African American students/ Black in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school they seem to have less developed social skills. ²	2.64	0.91
4. Our school disciplines African American/ Black students more frequently than students of other races.	2.60	1.00
11. If African American/ Black students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school they seem to have more psychological/emotional challenges.	2.56	0.92
30. Culture is a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at this school.	2.54	1.06
2. Disciplinary rules (classroom rules or school-wide rules for expected behaviors) are implemented consistently by all staff.	2.52	1.00
27. Race can affect teacher interpretation of student behavior at this school. ²	2.48	1.33
14. If African American/ Black students in this school are disciplined more frequently, it is because in this school they seem to be watched more closely by staff.	2.40	1.22
29. The race of students impacts teacher's perceptions of their behaviors at this school.	2.16	1.21

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
31. Race is a significant predictor of behavioral challenges at this school.	2.16	1.07
20. If disciplinary actions in this school impact African American/Black students more frequently, it is possibly due to racist beliefs of the teacher.	2.00	1.12
37. It is fair to implement different disciplinary actions for African American/Black students in order to prevent disciplinary disproportionality.	1.60	0.87

¹Statistically significant differences between Black/African American and White/Caucasian respondents.

²Statistically significant differences between newer teachers (1-3 years) and teachers serving four or more years.

³Statistically significant differences between teachers with fewer years of experience (1-3 years) and teachers with four or more years' experience.

Table D6

Policy Crosswalk

Non-violent Behaviors-Ratings of Clarity and Consistency in Disciplinary Policies and Data Tracking

Behavioral Descriptions	Source					Total
	District Code of Conduct Policy	Staff Handbook	Student Code of Conduct	Student Planner	Disciplinary Database	
Noncompliance	5	2	0	1	1	9
Dress Code	6	6	6	0	1	19
Integrity	6	2	0	0	1	9
Attendance	5	5	6	0	1	17
Inappropriate Interpersonal Behavior	5	2	2	0	1	10
Use of tobacco products	5	2	0	0	1	8
Electronic devices	6	0	2	0	1	9
Bus misbehavior	6	0	5	0	1	12
Profane, obscene, abusive or disrespectful language or acts	5	0	2	1	1	9
Gambling	2	0	0	0	1	3
Disruption	0	2	0	1	1	4
Misuse of equipment	0	2	0	0	0	2
Leaving class without permission and in unassigned area	0	2	0	0	1	3
Prepared and on-time	0	0	2	0	0	2
Silence and standing during Pledge of Allegiance	0	0	2	0	0	2

Food/drink prohibited	0	0	2	0	0	2
On high school property	0	0	2	0	0	2
Bringing valuables prohibited	0	0	2	0	1	3
Possession of counterfeit items	0	0	0	0	1	1
Use of counterfeit items	0	0	0	0	1	1
Immunization	0	0	0	0	1	1
Physical exam	0	0	0	0	1	1

Violent Behaviors- Ratings of Clarity and Consistency in Disciplinary Policies and Data Tracking Tools

Behavioral Descriptions	Source					Total
	District Code of Conduct Policy	Staff Handbook	Student Code of Conduct	Student Planner	Disciplinary Database	
Threats, false threats, acts of terror	6	2	2	0	1	11
Unjustified activation of fire or other alarm system	5	0	0	0	1	6
Fighting and Physical Aggression	6	2	0	0	1	9
Assault on an adult	5	0	0	0	1	6
Assault on student	5	0	0	0	1	6
Possession of a weapon, firearm, dangerous instrument or destructive device	6	2	0	0	1	9
Narcotics, alcoholic beverages, controlled substances,	6	2	0	0	1	9

chemicals and
drug
paraphernalia

Violations of State Criminal statutes	5	0	0	0	0	5
Violent Behavior	0	4	0	0	0	4
Sexual Assault	0	2	0	0	1	3
Assault—other	0	0	0	0	1	1
Robbery	0	0	0	0	1	1
Unlawfully setting a fire	0	0	0	0	1	1
Burning of a school building	0	0	0	0	1	1
Homicide	0	0	0	0	1	1
Robbery with a dangerous weapon	0	0	0	0	1	1
Taking indecent liberties with a minor	0	0	0	0	1	1
Kidnapping	0	0	0	0	1	1
Rape	0	0	0	0	1	1

Other Behaviors-Ratings of Clarity and Consistency in Disciplinary Policies and Data
Tracking Tools

Source						
Behavioral Descriptions	District Code of Conduct Policy	Staff Handbook	Student Code of Conduct	Student Planner	Disciplinary Database	Total
Bullying and Harassment	6	6	4	0	1	17
Sexual Harassment	2	0	0	0	1	3
Hazing	5	0	0	0	1	6
Extortion	5	0	2	0	1	8
Theft or destruction of school or personal property	5	2	0	0	1	8

Gang and gang related activities	6	0	0	0	1	7
Aiding and abetting	5	0	0	0	0	5
Affray	0	0	0	0	1	1
Disorderly conduct	0	0	0	0	1	1
Other School Defined Offense; Other	0	0	0	0	1	1
Repeat Offender	0	0	0	0	1	1

Table D7

Relationships across Four Domains of Power Subscales

Subscale	1	2	3
1. Disciplinary			
2. Structural	.040		
3. Cultural	.512 [*]	.198	
4. Interpersonal	-.001	-.137	.455 [*]

Table D8

Means and Standard Deviations across Domains of Power Subscales

Interpersonal		Disciplinary		Structural		Cultural	
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2.35	0.87	2.95	0.38	3.15	0.62	3.32	0.40

Note. Means joined with underline are not statistically significantly different.